THE WAY

A Little Book of Christian Truth.

BY CHARLES M. JACOBS.

Charles M. Cooper

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"After the Way, which they call a sect, so serve I the God of my fathers."—Acts xxiv, 14 (R. V.)

BY
CHARLES M. JACOBS

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FOREWORD

This little book is not a contribution to theology. If it contains any technicalities, the reader may be sure that they have escaped the writer's eye; and if, perchance it should come to any theologian's table, the writer asks that he lay it aside unread; it was not made for him.

It is merely the setting down of the things that lie nearest the writer's heart. He believes that any man ought to be able to say in simple language the things that he really believes. After twenty years of preaching and teaching he has felt the need of putting in some connected form of plain words the convictions that he holds about the things that are most worth while.

It has been written in the odd moments of a somewhat busy life, and is now offered to men and women who, amid the questionings of an age that is not on the whole an age of faith, feel that they need some

simple statement of elementary Christian truth. If it shall find a few such readers, and contribute somewhat to the strengthening of their faith in Him Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, it will have accomplished the purpose to which it has been sent.

CONTENTS

I. The Church of Jesus Christ.... 7

II. Human Nature 19

III. Jesus 28

IV. God 40

V. Christ the Teacher of Righteousness 57

VI. Christ the Saviour 75

VII. Faith 89

VIII. The Holy Ghost 104

IX. Means of Grace 115

X. A Christian's Life 133

XI. The Kingdom of God 149

XII. The Christian Hope 168

THE WAY

CHAPTER I

The Church of Jesus Christ

While Jesus was living on earth, He gathered around Him a small number of close followers. They were men and women who "believed on Him," that is, who had come to trust Him and were willing to obey Him. They had heard His teaching, and had learned to know His goodness and His power. They saw in Him the Only One Who could give them the comfort and the courage and the knowledge of truth which they needed in this life, and could make them certain that all would be well with them when this life was over. They saw in Him the link that connected them with God. They called Him "Master" and "Lord"; He called them "disciples," or "pupils."

These men and women were the first members of the Christian Church.

Jesus Himself said very little about the Church. He often spoke about "the kingdom of God," or "the kingdom of heaven," but that is not quite the same thing, though the thought of the Church and the thought of the kingdom are related. The name "Church" means "an assembly," "a gathering of people who have been called together," "a mass-meeting," "a community." We know of only two times that Jesus used the word. Once He said, "If thy brother sin against thee . . . . tell it to the Church"[1]; that might mean simply "the assembly of the brethren." The other time He said, "On this rock will I build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"[2]; that evidently means something more.

After Christ's Ascension the word became more common. It was used most often by St. Paul. Sometimes it meant the society of Christian people living at a certain place, like

[1] Matthew xviii, 17. [2] Matthew xvi, 18.

Ephesus or Corinth; sometimes it meant all the Christians in the world. But when Paul used the word in this larger meaning, it is clear that he thought of all these Christians as forming one single great society, as bound together into one great brotherhood, which is the Church. They make up one Body, of which Christ is the Head; they form a single Temple, of which He is the Foundation[3].

By and by the name of "Church" came to have other meanings too. It was applied to those bodies of Christians which had bishops at their head; it was given to societies of Christians who had certain creeds; it was given even to the buildings in which Christian people met for worship. But all of these meanings of the word are later than the time of the New Testament.

Now, we have kept them all in constant use. We say, "Are you going to Church?", meaning, "Are you going to the Church-building?" or, "Are you going to a gathering for worship?" We ask, "To what Church do you belong?" and mean, "With what special society of Christian people are you

[3] Ephesians ii, 20; iv, 4.

connected?" We say, "The Church believes in Jesus Christ," meaning either, "That special society of Christians to which I belong believes in Christ," or, "All Christians believe in Christ." We even speak of Jews "going to Church" though they do not believe in Christ at all. Thus, when we speak about the Church there are many things that we may mean, and those who hear us cannot be sure which one of them we really do mean: indeed, we are not always sure ourselves. Let us try to get this clear.

The word Church, then, is a name for a great spiritual society. Its members are all those who believe in Jesus Christ, and accept Him as their Lord. That is the truest and largest meaning of the word. It is what Christian people ought to have in their minds when they say, "I believe in the Holy Catholic, or Christian, Church, the Communion of Saints." All those who accept Christ as their Lord, and trust Him to be their Saviour, their Guide and their Commander form one great spiritual brother-

hood. They belong to one another, because they belong to Christ. Their bodies may be tens or hundreds or thousands of miles apart, but that does not matter in the least. Wherever a man is with Christ, there a member of the Church is with the Church's Head, and there is the Church. Thus the Church can be, indeed it is, in a hundred places or a thousand places at the same time. No man can enter it unless he trusts Christ as his Lord; no man can be driven out of it, unless he ceases to trust in Christ; if that happens, nothing can keep him in the Church.

Of course there can be only one such spiritual brotherhood, only one Church of Jesus Christ, but for that very reason, it must show itself in many places and in many forms. A single river, running under ground, rises to the surface in a thousand springs; a single vein of ore comes to the top of the earth in a hundred "outcroppings." So this one great Church of all Christians displays itself in thousands of larger and smaller societies. These societies are made up of men and women who profess to be-

lieve in Christ. They have different names; they have different customs of worship, different forms of organization; they differ in many of their beliefs; but in one thing they all agree,—they wish to be known as Christian, they "profess Christ before men." Individual members of these societies may be hypocrites; they may be thoroughly wicked in their daily lives, but they want men to think of them as followers of Jesus and servants of Christ. These societies, too, are called churches.

These churches differ very greatly in size and extent. Some of them have millions of members, others have only hundreds; some of them are found in many lands, others in only a little corner of a single country. But each of them has its own distinguishing marks. It may be some special belief that is found only in that one group of Christians; or it may be some special form of organization or government; or it may happen, especially in America, that two or more of these societies differ in little else than in the time and place of their origin. Thus we have a Baptist Church, which re-

fuses baptism to children and baptizes adults only by immersion; we have a Presbyterian or "Elders'" Church, and an Episcopal, or "Bishops'" Church, named after the kind of organization which they believe all churches ought to have; we have a Lutheran Church, teaching a view of Christianity that was first taught, in its completeness, in the time of the Reformation; we have a Roman Catholic Church, claiming that all Christians ought to be subject to the spiritual authority of the Bishop of Rome. On the other hand, we have some churches which differ very little from some of the rest, except that they have arisen at different times and in different lands. Everywhere we look, then, we see churches; indeed, we see so many of them that it is hard for us to realize that there is, after all, only one great spiritual brotherhood, of whose existence these many churches are the sign.

There are many good people, indeed, to whom these divisions are a cause of offence. They feel that we are doing wrong in keeping them alive; that we ought to do away with them as speedily as possible, and have

only one great organization in which all professing Christians would be numbered. And yet there is something to be said for the churches. There are important differences between them. We do not all agree as yet; indeed, there are many very important things about which we entirely disagree. So long as this is true, it is better that we should have our many churches, each standing for its own beliefs, than to have a single organization, filled with disagreement and contention. Our divisions are harmful only when they do not express real differences, or when they become the servants of intolerance and bigotry.

There are two ways, then, in which we can rightly use the word "Church." We can use it of the great spiritual brotherhood of all believers in Jesus Christ, or we can use it of those societies of men and women who profess to believe in Him.

As we look about us, and observe these societies of professing Christians actually at work, we notice that there are some things at which all of them are busy. Individuals

may be cold or lukewarm toward these tasks, but the churches are working at them all the time. Indeed, it is for these tasks that they exist.

For one thing, they are always declaring their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord. That is one of the reasons why a man who really believes in Christ can hardly help belonging to a church. We can scarcely think of a man really believing in Christ and wishing to keep his faith concealed. He will almost certainly want other people to know about it. He will remember that Jesus said, "Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father which is in heaven."[4] He will recall Christ's word about the candle, "No man lighteth a candle and setteth it under a peck-measure, but placed it on a candle-stick."[5] There have been times when it has been dangerous to be known as a Christian, but even in those times the more earnest believers in Christ's lordship have been willing to let their faith be known.

Again, they are always preaching the

[4] Matthew x, 32. [5] Matthew v, 15.

Gospel, telling and retelling the story of the life of Jesus and explaining and re-explaining the meaning of His life for men. They have two purposes in this. One of them is to make the faith of their own members stronger, to increase the measure of their devotion to the Christ Whom they have called their Lord; the other is to lead other men to that same faith, and thus increase the number of those who are followers of Christ.

A third thing that all of them are doing is helping people to live according to the standards that Christ has set. They do this partly by preaching, partly by giving Christians a chance to work together in deeds of love and mercy for their fellow men. We seldom realize how much the churches have accomplished by this patient and persistent preaching and illustrating of the standards of Jesus Christ, how they have made people think things wrong that everybody once thought right, how they have raised the purposes of men, and even of nations, above selfishness, how they have lifted burdens from the shoulders of the weak.

We notice, too, that all of these churches regard their tasks as God-given. They are God's work, not their own. They labor at them because they know that these are the things that God wants done, and are sure that He has appointed them to do them. Therefore they work at them with gladness, for all their labor is just a part of the reasonable service which Christ has a right to ask of those who call him Lord and Master. They work at them with courage, because they feel themselves borne along by the power of God, and recall the words of Jesus, "On this rock will I build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."[6]

To sum it all up, then, in a few words! The greatest of all the spiritual facts of life is the lordship of Jesus Christ. He has a right to our trust and our obedience. When we acknowledge that right and yield Him our loyal allegiance, we enter at once into the spiritual brotherhood of the Church. But that brotherhood—to return to a figure that has been used before—is like a river

[6] Matthew xvi, 18.

flowing under ground, which wells up to the surface in a thousand springs. Each one of those springs is the river; but it is the river at work, turning the desert into a garden, clothing the earth with green, giving life to man and beast. So the societies of Christians, which we call churches, are the Church; but they are the Church at work, preaching the Gospel, spreading the message of the lordship of Jesus and the love of God, doing God's work of mercy, and thus adding continually to the spiritual brotherhood of those who believe in Christ.

CHAPTER II

Human Nature

Christians are men and women. They have professed loyalty to Christ, and if they are true Christians they are really loyal to Him, but they have not got rid of their human nature. They never will be rid of it. If we wish to understand them, then, we must know something about this human nature.

It is a strange thing, this human nature of ours. We all share it, and it might be supposed that we would know all about it, and yet most of us know it as little as the rain-drop knows the ocean, out of which it has come and into which it falls. The mass of it lies all around us, but only a few of us study it, and those few chiefly that they may take advantage of its weaknesses. It is the most changeable thing in creation, and the thing that changes least. It moves through history like a great tide, ebbing and flowing,

rising and falling, taking on some new appearance every instant, but remaining all the while the same. Indeed, the strangest thing about it is that it does not change. As far back as history reaches we find men fighting and loving and praying and cursing, just as they are doing today, and about the same things. That is why Jesus could say, "As it was in the days of Noah"—away back on the borderland of history—"so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man"[1]—which will end recorded time.

Now it stands to reason that our human nature has a great deal to do with our Christianity, and so has what we think of our human nature. What we think of Christ depends very largely on what we think of ourselves, and what we think of ourselves depends very much on what we think of other men. The higher our opinion of men, the lower our opinion of Christ is likely to be. If we feel that men are good enough without Him, we shall not think very highly of Him; if we believe that everything would have gone along just as well if He had not been

[1] Luke xvii, 26.

born, then we shall not estimate the value of His coming very highly. On the other hand, if we are persuaded that Christ gives men something which it is necessary for them to have, takes away from our human nature some defects that are a part of it, and adds to it some element which only He can supply, then we shall look on Him very differently. That is, in fact, the way that we become Christians, for Christian loyalty to Christ is born, after all, in gratitude; "we love Him because He first loved us."[2]

When we come to study this human nature of ours, the very first discovery we make is that it has two sides,—a bright side and a dark side, a good side and a bad side. Not every man is willing to look at both of them. One man is an optimist about it; he sees only good in himself and his fellow-men and in the world. Another is a pessimist; he sees only the wrong and the evil. They argue vigorously which of them is right, when the truth is that neither of them is right, because neither of them will see all there is to see.

[2] I John iv, 19.

Jesus saw both sides; He spoke of the world as a field where wheat and tares are growing up together.[3]

Now when we turn our eyes upon human nature, looking for the bright side which it may reveal to us, the first thing that impresses us is its capacity for greatness. We are lost in astonishment at men's ability to do things. There is something awe-inspiring, for example, in the vast accumulation of knowledge that men have stored up. To be sure, the process of gathering that knowledge has been going on for centuries, but it has moved so rapidly in the last hundred years or so that it has become impossible for a single mind to keep track of it at all. Now and then this knowledge takes practical form in some spectacular achievement,—the sending of a message through the air, the flying of an airplane across an ocean. Even then we are scarcely surprised at it, for we have long since ceased to place a limit to the things that men can do.

It is just as hard to set a limit to what men may become. The possibilities are too

[3] Matthew xiii, 24-30.

great. A man may become almost anything. We see them coming up from the humblest beginnings to places where they control the earthly destinies of millions of their fellow-men. They seem to do this by a mysterious power that they possess, and there are so many cases of the kind that we conclude that the power must be a power of human nature. We see boys growing up to leadership among the thinkers of the world, thinking great thoughts and teaching others to think those same thoughts after them. Here and there we see in history the towering figure of some spiritual giant, some man who has risen to heights of character and wisdom; he may be long dead, but still he speaks; he becomes the teacher, the example, the inspiration of those who have come after him. These "super-men" are a constant warning against setting our estimate of human nature all too low.

But human nature has another side, a discouraging and disheartening side. It is forever disappointing us. With all the possibilities of greatness which it has, it gets such a little way forward. The one man rises, the

many stay back; the one man shows what can be, the many show what is. Even the greatest and the best show themselves, when we come to see them closely, touched with weaknesses and faults which they ought not to have. They fail, somehow, to become quite all that they might be.

Then, too, when we study these men who have grown up to what we call greatness, we find that all of them have had to fight their way up. They have had to contend with every kind of obstacle. Some of these obstacles have been deliberately thrown in their way by other men, but the most serious handicaps which they have had to overcome, have been those that were in themselves. They have had to resist a downward pull all the time, and when we look, as we sometimes must, into our own lives we find that same downward pull at work on us. The drift of human nature is downward, not upward.

And the most disappointing thing about this human nature of ours is its perpetual failure in goodness. We all know that failure; we find it in ourselves, we observe it

in other men. Of course, we have not all the same standards by which to judge it, one man's is higher than another's; and yet it is scarcely possible to find a man who will even pretend that he has actually lived up to the standards he accepts. We have to struggle toward them, advancing a little way and then slipping back, moving up again and once more falling down. We feel ourselves in constant battle with some hidden force. We cannot well define it, but we are conscious of its presence. It is working steadily to make it hard for us to do the things we know we ought to do and to become the kind of men we know we ought to be. We are conscious that other men, too, are struggling just as we are, and we know that if any one of us lets go and stops fighting, he will slip down and down, till he has reached the bottom. What it means to be at the bottom of the human scale we can only dimly guess. We can imagine ourselves as vile as our vilest thought, as base as our most degraded impulse; but even then we have not fathomed the possibilities of evil that lie in human nature.

For it is human nature that is at fault. Its possibilities are as great one way as they are the other; we can no more set its downward than we can its upward limit. Thus we find ourselves with endless possibilities both ways. Both are ours because we are human. They are the inheritance which we receive at birth.

All of this we can learn without Christ. It is the simplest lesson of experience. The world is a place of struggle between good and evil, both of them making their home in us, and the advantage is on the side of evil. The Bible teaches the same truth. It tells us that we were "made in the image of God,"[1] carrying within us the possibility of heaven; it also tells us that we are "carnal, sold under sin,"[2] carrying within us something more than the mere possibility of evil. The everlasting problem of humanity is, "How to defeat the evil and move upward toward the best."

Christians find the answer in Jesus Christ. He gives us a goal and the power to live toward it. He shows us human nature at its supreme best, setting us a standard by

1. Gen. 1:27
2. Rom. 7:14

which to measure all goodness. And then, when the real evil of our human nature comes into clearest light, He gives the power by which we can grow upward to the goodness that He has shown. Thus He becomes a source of gladness and confidence and courage.

CHAPTER III

Jesus

Christianity is the religion of Jesus Christ. It is the religion He lived and taught; it is also the religion of which He is the center. It is therefore, in the strictest sense, an historical religion, for it had its origin in a definite place and at a time that we can fix, it had its complete expression in a human life, and it centers around a Person Who has actually lived among men. That Person is Jesus of Nazareth.

Along the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and stretching but a few miles back into the mountains, lies the land that we know as Palestine. For many centuries it was the home of the Jewish people. In this land and among this people Jesus lived. His home was a little village close up by the northern hills of Galilee. Out of this village Jesus went to become a public teacher

of religion. He was about thirty years of age when His teaching-years began, and there is nothing to show that before then He had ever attracted any special attention to Himself. In three short years, or less, the work of His life was done. In those years He had no home, and no friends except the little group of pupils whom He gathered around Him. "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests," He said once, "but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."[1] Another time He said, "Whosoever doeth the will of God he is My mother and sister and brother."[2] Judged by their consequences to the world, no other three years in all the centuries of human history have been so fruitful. The seeds of truth that Jesus sowed in those years have been bearing fruit in all the centuries that have followed, and still are bearing fruit today.

To be sure, the soil into which that seed was sown had already been prepared for it. That is what St. Paul meant when He said,

[1] Matthew viii, 20. [2] Mark iii, 35.

"In the fullness of the times, God sent forth His Son."[3] The people among whom Jesus lived was a religious people. Their religion was peculiarly their own; no other people shared it. They believed in the One God, while others believed in many gods; they had a religious law of righteousness higher than any other nation had ever had; they had done more thinking, and clearer and truer thinking, about God and righteousness and truth than had been done by any others. This had prepared them for the work that Jesus was to do, and men who believe in Jesus look back now to the time when this preparation was going on and see in it the work of God Himself.

Thus Jesus did not have to begin at the beginning, as does a Christian teacher who goes into a heathen land today. The foundations were already laid. The people to whom He came had "the law and the prophets." For centuries, too, they had been expecting the advent of a great religious leader whom God was to send. They spoke of this Expected One as the "Mes-

[3] Galatians iv, 4.

siah," the "Anointed." When Jesus came, He claimed that name for Himself. He has it still in the name of "Christ," which means "Messiah." He took the religion of the Jews as true within its limits, and transformed it into a new religion, deeper and broader and more wonderful. He could say, "Ye have heard that it hath been said to them of old time," and quote the sacred writings of the Jews, adding, "But I say unto you."[4]

The teaching of Jesus drew to Him the attention of great crowds of people. They found in it things that made them think more deeply and more seriously than ever they had thought before. He touched their consciences and made them feel that they were sinners, because He set the standards of human character higher than ever any one had done. He taught them that a lustful thought broke the commandment against adultery, that anger violated the command, "Thou shalt not kill."[5] He taught the evil of selfishness as it had never been taught,

[4] Matthew v, 21. [5] Matthew v, 21ff.

and the men who heard His words learned from Him that selfishness is the one great sin that is always dragging human nature down. He tore away the cloak of self-righteousness and self-conceit that was making some men think themselves perfect, and men who were looked upon as saints found themselves pictured in His teaching as "white-washed sepulchres, outwardly beautiful, but inwardly full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."[6] It was a terrifying and humiliating message that Jesus preached to men who thought that human nature was very good, for He taught that human nature is not good as long as it has room for selfishness of any kind and still retains a single weakness or a single fault.

Nor was Jesus' teaching the only thing about Him that made men think. He actually lived the standards which He taught. That is one of the great differences between Him and all other teachers. Many men have given the world high and noble thoughts about life and character and conduct, though

[6] Matthew xxiii, 27.

none of them, not even the very greatest, has ever approached in his teaching the pure perfection of the thought of Jesus; but none of them has lived out his teaching as Jesus did. With enemies all around Him, seeking some flaw in His character which they might make a ground of accusation, he went quietly about His work, and foiled them by the completeness of His holiness. Most wonderful of all, the men who knew Him best, who lived with Him day by day for most of those three years, thought of Him at last as God, and called Him God; so completely did He satisfy the pure and lofty ideas of what God ought to be, which they had learned partly as Jews, partly as His disciples.

Yet Jesus was not content to speak to men only about themselves. He was a teacher not of morality, but of religion. Thus He was always talking about God. The idea that there can be any goodness apart from God is altogether foreign to Jesus' thinking. A human life is good only insofar as God is in it; a man's character grows only as God's will becomes its law; the acts of his life are

good only when he purposes the thing that God desires. A man can grow in goodness, therefore, only by relying upon a power that is higher and a will that is purer than his own; he can put the selfishness out of his life only by putting something else into it, substituting the will of God for the will of self. This reliance upon God is faith, and faith takes all the worry and anxiety out of life. The man who believes in God, who trusts Him and follows His leading, can go through hardship and sorrow and privation and suffering with a quiet mind. "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?"[7] was His reproving question when His disciples were frightened by the nearness of death. "Why do you worry? Think of the birds and the flowers," He said in the Sermon on the Mount.[8] He taught His disciples, when they prayed to say, "Our Father Who art in heaven,"[9] and His teaching was full of the thought of the heavenly Father's love. The God He wanted men to trust and to obey was a God to be loved, not to

[7] Matthew viii, 26. [8] Matthew vi, 28ff. [9] Matthew vi, 9.

be feared, and He called His message an "Evangel," a "message of good."

But the things that Jesus said about Himself were quite as strange and wonderful as the things He taught men about God. The power of His teaching to grip the consciences of men seems to have lain quite as much in the way He taught it as in what He taught. "He taught as one having authority," St. Matthew tells us, "and not as the scribes."[10] "Never man spake as this man,"[11] was the verdict of those who heard Him, and more than once the writers of the life of Jesus tell us that "All the people were astonished."[12]

For one thing, there was a sureness about His way of teaching which showed that He was Himself convinced of the truth of what He said, even when it was new and strange; and yet there was about Him no trace of self-conceit, no sign of any desire to make Himself great. "If I bear witness of Myself," He said to the Jews, "My witness is

[10] Matthew vii, 29. [11] John vii, 46.
[12] Matthew vii, 28; xxii, 33; Mark i, 22, etc.

nothing."[13] All through His life, by word and act, He showed that He felt Himself perfectly at one with God and, therefore, when He spoke to men, He expected that they would listen to Him as though God Himself were speaking. He called God "My Father"; He said, "I honor My Father, of Whom ye say that He is your God."[14] When He asked His disciples who they thought He was, and Peter answered, "Thou art the Son of the living God," He said, "Blessed art thou, Simon, for flesh and blood have not revealed this unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven."[15] He told His little group of friends, before His Passion, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," [16] and again, "I and My Father are one."[17] Thus the men who knew Him best gradually came to think of Him as more than merely man; they believed in Him as God.

Their belief in Him was all the stronger because of the miracles He did. Legend has

[13] John v, 31.
[14] John viii, 49, 54.
[15] Matthew xvi, 16, 17.
[16] John xiv, 9.
[17] John x, 30.

woven wonderful stories about the lives of many men, and Jesus is not the only character in history of whom miracle-stories are told. If we were asked to believe Him more than man only because He performed miracles, we might hesitate to give these stories credence, but the claims of Jesus do not rest upon His miracles. "Believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the works' sake,"[18] He said once. He was continually resisting the craving of the curious for miracles, and when He did perform one, it was to teach some lesson about the love of God, never to make men think more highly of Himself. The character of Jesus is our strongest ground for believing the stories of His miracles, but those who saw the miracles found them additional reason for looking up to Him as God.

This wonderful life went out, after three years of constant blessing, in agony and shame. The official heads of His own people, their teachers of religion, saw in Him an enemy. His teaching was something new;

[18] John xiv, 11.

it would have made the religion of Israel a new religion; it would have changed their religious law and custom. The real truth is that the religion of Jesus was not thought "practical"; even today there are many who do not so regard it. He was accused of blasphemy, of "making Himself equal with God," tried and convicted and handed over to the Roman rulers of Palestine to be put to death. Afterwards His disciples remembered that He made no effort to resist or to escape; on the contrary, He went to meet His sufferings as the fulfillment of the Father's will for Him. They crucified Him. He died the death of exquisite torture that Rome reserved for criminals; but even the agony of it failed to break the consciousness that He was one with God. His body was laid in a tomb, and the three busy years of "Gospeling" were over. His disciples were discouraged and disheartened. They thought this was the end.

Then came the most wonderful chapter in the life of Jesus. On the third day after His burial, the tomb where He had lain was

empty, and before that day was over the disciples, who were mourning Him as dead, had seen Him and talked with Him. They saw Him at more than one time and in more than one place; they believed, indeed, that He had come back to live with them again. But just when they were beginning to think that He was with them to stay, He disappeared. "A cloud received Him out of their sight."[19] The eyes of men saw Him no more, but His disciples knew that He was living. He Who had come from God, had now returned to God. His life had been loaned for a little while to the world that the world might always be the richer for what He had brought it; and now that life had gone back to Him Who sent, leaving two promises,—"I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there ye may be also"; and "I will come again and take you unto Myself."[20] Then, in the circle of those who had known Jesus best, was told the story of His birth,—of how His mother was a virgin, and of how the angels sang above the fields of Bethlehem the night that He was born.

[19] Acts i, 9. [20] John xiv, 2, 3.

CHAPTER IV

God

What do we mean by God? To many people that may seem an altogether useless question. They will say, "As soon ask what we mean by St. Paul or St. John; no one has ever tried to define them, but there were people once who knew them, and we know about them what these people have told us; in the same way, there have been people who have known God and have told us about Him." That is the way the common man looks at it. To his way of thinking God is "just God," a Person Whom he has never seen, but Whom he believes to exist; a Person of Whom he is willing to be told, but about Whom he wants to hear no argument.

Now there is something to be said for that view of the matter. For one thing, it is the view of the men who wrote the books of the Bible. You may search the Bible from cover to cover, and nowhere will you find a defini-

tion of God, though His name is on almost every page. The men who wrote those books were men who had learned to know God by living with Him; they were the kind of people of whom Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see Him."[1] These men have set down for other people the things that they learned of God.

The one Person from Whom we learn the most about God is, of course, Jesus Christ. Those who have faith in Him believe that if we really want to know God at all, we must go to Christ for our knowledge, forgetting everything else that has ever been said or written about God until after we have learned what Christ has to teach us. Jesus Himself said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father"[2]; "If ye had known Me, ye would have known My Father also"[3] and John writes, "No man hath seen God at any time, the Only-begotten Son hath declared Him."[4] *Our knowledge of God must start with Christ.*

[1] Matthew v, 8.
[2] John xiv, 9. [3] John viii, 19.
[4] John i, 18

But that is the very thing that most of our thinking about God does not do; it does not start with Christ at all. At best our thought of God is only partly Jesus' thought. Our minds are full of notions about Him that have drifted into them from elsewhere, and we use the knowledge that we get from Christ to piece out these other notions. And so, because our knowledge does not start with Christ, it is not really Christian knowledge; sometimes, indeed, it is little more than heathenism, plus some ideas that have come from Christ.

Of course, that puts the question, "What do we mean by God?" in a very different light. It is not a useless question after all, but a very necessary question, and one that we ought to ask.

Most of us would agree that, when we hear the name of God, the very first thing that comes into our minds is the thought of *One Who can do everything.* God is a Being of unlimited and illimitable power. Whatever else He may be, He must be the

Almighty. That marks the difference between Him and us,—we are weak and He is strong. All our life long we are more or less completely at the mercy of conflicting forces which push us this way and that, and finally swallow us up. We think of God as the One Who controls these forces. Somewhere in, or above, this world that frames us and sustains us and at last destroys us, there is One Who is this world's Master. We feel that it must be so, though we do not always think it out.

Now that idea may be Christian; it may also be heathen, for the heathen have it too. The Norseman saw the swift stroke of the lightning and said, "It is Thor; he has thrown his hammer again"; the Persian saw the sun riding high in the deep blue Oriental sky, and said, "It is Mithra; he is on his way once more"; the Romans saw the grain silently ripening in the fields, and said, "It is Ceres; she is sending us another harvest." The heathen are thinking always of the things men cannot do, and then of God as the One Who can do them. They think and talk of God in terms of power.

We, too, believe that God is the Almighty, but when, in thinking of Him, we make His almightiness the first thing and the main thing, we are thinking like the heathen, not like Christ. Jesus never put that first. Indeed, one of the things that Jesus has to teach us about God is that *there are some things God cannot do;* not because He has not the power, but because the doing of them would be wrong. Jesus Himself could feed a crowd of people by a miracle, but He could not feed Himself when He was hungry in the wilderness, because it would have been a sin; He could raise Lazarus from the dead, but He could not come down from the Cross. So God could raise Jesus from the dead, but He could not take from His lips the bitter cup of sorrow in Gethsemane. Why did not God prevent the awful suffering and sorrow of the Great War? Thousands have asked that question, thinking only of the almighty power, which is the first thing in their thought of Him. Many of these questioners, finding no answer to their question, have said, at last, "there is no God." But the simple answer is, "God could not"; not because He

had not the power, but because, even in God, there is something higher than power.

A second thing that always enters into our thought of God is the idea that He is somehow *interested in the lives of men.* A God without a purpose or a plan would be no god at all. Of course, that limits our thought of what God can do; for He must use His power to carry out His purpose, He cannot act for the defeat of His own plan. But we are all very sure that we are some way included in that purpose. He is not indifferent to what happens in the world; least of all is He indifferent to what we are and how we act. That is what we mean when we speak about "the will of God for men."

That, too, is an idea that may be Christian and may be heathen. Others than Christians believe that God is interested in human affairs, far enough, at least, to give men laws which they must obey. He sets them tasks which they must perform on pain of His displeasure, and there are some things that men can do which make God pleased with them, and ready to reward them. Thus

the religion of many people consists in doing certain things to keep God from being angry with them, and doing certain other things to earn His rewards. Sometimes it is acts of ritual which are believed to keep God's anger off,—a sacrifice of blood, an offering of rice, the repetition of some form of sacred words; sometimes it is obedience to a code of law which He is believed to have given, governing with iron rules the life of every day; but all the while these people, when they think of God, think of Him as a taskmaster, holding men to His will through fear of what will happen if they fail. Their idea of the tasks, which they believe that He has set, is not always the same; but one thing they have in common,—the fear of the Almighty Lawgiver which spurs them on to duty; and always there is the expectation of some rich reward to encourage them in the doing of His will.

We also believe that God is interested in the affairs of men. No one ever had more to say about the "will of God for men" than Jesus had; upon no other life has God's will ever rested with such complete authority as

it rested on the life of Christ. How often Jesus said, "I must!" Hear Him saying, "I must work the works of Him that sent me"[5]; "The Son of Man must suffer many things."[6] Hear Him praying, "Let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done."[7] Hear Him teaching His disciples, when they pray, to say, "Thy will be done."[8] But even Jesus, when He spoke of God, did not start with the thought of His will for men. Of God's will, as well as of God's power, we are compelled to say, "There is something higher."

Another thing about which most men are agreed is that God is *difficult of access.* He is hidden behind things; we see the things, but Him we do not see. Seek for Him as we may, He eludes our search. The signs of Him are all around us,—in the stars that keep their ceaseless, silent vigil over the changing world; in the gold of the sunset sky and the soft beauty of the wayside flower; in the roar of the winter wind and

[5] John ix, 4. [6] Mark viii, 31. [7] Luke xxii, 42. [8] Matthew vi, 10.

the crash of the summer thunder; in the mystery of life, and in the longings of the souls of men. But when we seek to find God in things, it seems that they are only His garment of concealment after all. It is as though He had just been here, but the moment of our seeking finds Him gone. It is only when He chooses to be found that men can discover Him, only when He lifts the veil that they can see Him; only when He breaks the silence that they can hear His voice. And yet we all believe that He has been heard and seen. We believe that some men, favored above their fellows, have actually known Him, and learned from Him what is His will. To these men we go for our knowledge of Him.

And there, once more, we have an idea that may be Christian, and may not. Many religions have their soothsayers and their oracles, and to them men go when they want to know the will of God. The idea of "revelation," the notion that this hidden God makes Himself known through chosen spokesmen, is common to almost all religions. Priests and prophets and preachers

and teachers are regarded as means through which we gain access to the hidden God and through which He speaks to men.

In all these things, then, there is nothing that is peculiarly Christian. The idea that God is a Being of almighty power, with a sovereign will that all men must obey, Who makes Himself known to men through revelation, is one that a man may hold without being a Christian at all; he may be a Jew or a Mohammedan. That is why it was said, a little way back, that many of our ideas about God are heathen notions, pieced out with some notions which we get from Christ. In our thinking about God, the main thing is to get started right. If we want to have a Christian God, we must make our start where Christ makes His.

The word that best describes Christ's starting-point is probably *character*. The use of the word suggests a resemblance between man and God. It is a man's character that decides what a man wants and what he will strive to get. It determines the direction

of his will and fixes the objects to which he will apply whatever power he has. Really to know a man, it is necessary to know his character. The same thing is true about our knowledge of God. It is not enough to know Him as almighty power or sovereign will, but if we wish our thought of Him to be complete, we must know what is back of His will and what decides the way that He will use His power.

Now that is the very thing Christ tells us. It is in the showing forth of God's character that His revelation of God consists. Indeed, it was because they found in Him an idea of God which surpassed anything they had ever imagined that Christ's disciples called Him God. He satisfied their feeling of what God ought to be. It is for that same reason that Christians ever since have been confessing, "I believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, our Lord." For Jesus did something more than teach men about God. He actually lived out His teaching about God in just the same way that He lived out His teaching about men. He showed men how God would act in human

surroundings. That is why we always have to explain Christ's words by what He did, His life by what He said.

The first thing that we learn from Jesus about the character of God is that He is *holy,* and holiness means complete and perfect goodness. When we say that God is holy, we mean that we can apply to Him the highest human standards of goodness, and He will more than satisfy them. The things that we compel ourselves to do because they are our duty, God does because it is His nature to do them. That which is in us a law imposed upon our lives from outside of them, is in God a law of His own being. All of us have an instinctive feeling of what goodness is, and when we have learned from Christ to think of God as above all things a holy God, we are convinced that this feeling must come to us from God Himself; we believe that our conscience is, in some true sense, a revelation of His will. The defects in goodness which we find in ourselves have no place at all in God and His holiness is the one true and

perfect standard of goodness for all men. The whole law of God for Christians is summed up in the one commandment, "Be holy, as He Who has called you is holy."[9] To be good means to be like God in character, so that our good deeds come out of a good desire, a purpose which is not only like, but really is, God's own. That is the whole meaning of Christ's teaching about righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount.

It is scarcely necessary to say that this thought of character as the chief thing in God changes our ordinary notion of God's power. It limits the things that God can do. It makes it very clear that there are some things He cannot do. He can do nothing that conflicts with His goodness; He must do everything that helps to establish his own goodness among men. His purpose cannot be to set men tasks or to make men fear Him and acknowledge His almightiness; on the other hand, it must have something to do with the victory of goodness over everything that is not good.

[9] I Peter i, 15.

That means, of course, that God's relations with men are relations of character, not of force. He is interested in men's affairs not for His own sake but for their sake, not to compel them to do something for Him but to make them partakers of His own goodness. For God's holiness is the holiness of love, and love is unselfishness. That is the supreme lesson that we learn from Jesus. The complete unselfishness of His life is the revelation of what God is. Looking back upon that life, and remembering what he had heard of Jesus and what he had seen in Him, John said, "God is love."[10] He gave everything, He took nothing. He denied Himself and sacrificed Himself to the uttermost for men, in order that men might learn to deny themselves and sacrifice themselves for Him and for their fellow-men, and thus become like Him,—that is to say, like God.

It was to make this clear that Jesus used the name "Father," when He talked of God. No single word was oftener upon His lips. He called God "my Father," but He also

[10] I John iv, 8, 16.

called Him "your Father," and He taught people to pray, "Our Father, Who art in heaven." He makes us think of humanity as one great family of brothers, with the life of the one Father in them all. They may not know that they are brothers. They may hate one another and oppress one another and rob and kill one another, but they are brothers still. They may not know their Father, or love Him or obey Him, but He is their Father still. Indeed, the fatherhood of men over their children is only the earthly image of the Fatherhood of God. "If ye, who are evil," said Jesus once, "know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him."[11]

When once we get Christ's idea of God's Fatherhood, it changes our whole thought about "the will of God." It is not at all the will of a despot, who makes what laws he pleases and compels men to obey them, but the will of a Father, Who is always seeking His children's good. And just be-

[11] Matthew vii, 11.

cause He is our Father, we can trust Him and obey Him gladly and pray to Him and make His will our law. That is why Jesus says that it is wrong for men to worry about anything, because there is always the heavenly Father to care for them; that is why St. Paul can say that "Love is the fulfilling of the law."[12]

Then, too, this truth about the character of God changes the common notion that God is hard to find. To be sure, it does not answer all our questions about God, but it does give us all the knowledge that we need in order to grow like Him. He is not the hidden God, who occasionally lifts the veil of darkness that conceals Him and gives some favored mortal a brief glimpse of His glory and His truth. He is not the silent God, Who speaks in riddles through some mysterious oracle, or now and then in tones of thunder to an awe-struck world, or whispers a word in the ear of a sleeping prophet, to be by him imparted to mankind. He is a God Who is standing all the time in the full view of men who will not look His way;

[12] Romans xiii, 10.

Who is speaking all the time to men who will not listen. We still believe that He cannot be known unless He reveals Himself, but that does not matter in the least, because He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER V

Christ the Teacher of Righteousness

Jesus has brought the world a message about God and taught us how to think of Him. But He has done more than that, for He has taught us what human goodness is. He has given us a standard by which to measure it, a test by which we may discover whether it is in ourselves. He is Himself this standard. Instead of a law spoken from a distant mountain-top, telling us what to do, we, who are Christians, have in Jesus Christ a law lived out in the words and deeds of a human life, showing us what to be. We find it in His teaching, for He has spoken the last word about human goodness. We find it in his living, for we see in Him the perfect illustration of the perfect law and interpret all other law by what we find in Him. Let us try to see, then, what this law of Jesus is.

The very first thing that we learn from Jesus is that *goodness is a matter of character.* There is no goodness except in a person who is good. There is goodness in God; there may be goodness in the secret places of a human life; but there is no goodness anywhere else, not in the words we speak or the acts we do. It is not a veneer laid on life's surface, covering life's ugliness with a layer of beauty. It is rather a quality of life itself. It touches men's thoughts and desires at their very source and gives them purpose and direction.

It is this elementary truth that Jesus was declaring when He talked about the good tree which is sure to bring forth good fruit and the evil tree which is just as sure to bring forth evil fruit.[1] "The good man," He said again, "out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good, and the evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."[2] He said that the kingdom of heaven is like a little

[1] Matthew vii, 17, 18. [2] Luke vi, 45.

leaven, which spreads through a mass of flour and saturates the dough with its own quality.[3] He also spoke about "the leaven of the Pharisees"[4] as a thing to beware of, meaning the evil at the center which corrupts the whole of life.

That was Christ's constant quarrel with the sham-saints of His day,—either they did not know, or else they had forgotten, this simple truth about goodness. He called them "white-washed sepulchres, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."[5] He told them that they were busy cleaning the outside of the cup, and never washed the inside; He called them "offspring of vipers," and asked them how they expected to escape the damnation of hell.[6] This from the mild and gentle Jesus, Whose life was spent in deeds of kindness and acts of love and pity; Who said, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest!"[7] It almost seems

[3] Matthew xiii, 33. [4] Matthew xvi, 6.
[5] Matthew xxiii, 27. [6] Matthew xxiii, 33. [7] Matthew xi, 28.

as though there were no words strong enough to express His indignation when He thought about them. And yet, when He had to do with a woman taken in adultery, He said to her simply, "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more."[8] The difference was that they were hypocrites; they pretended to be one thing, while they were really something else. They believed that they were good because they did the kind of thing that good people were expected to do. Thus they were living a lie, because in the effort to act like good men, they forgot to cultivate the quality of goodness in their own secret souls. They were not genuine.

He had the same contention with the religion of His day. It was formal and conventional. It belonged to the outside of life. A man who did not kill anybody thought that he was keeping the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill"; a man who did not yield his body to the temptation of the flesh thought that he was pure. Christ saw it differently. He declared that the angry thought which issues in a curse is really the

[8] John viii, 1-11.

sin of murder; that the consent of a man's will to a thought of lust is really the sin of adultery. The public exercises of religion—the fastings and the prayers and the charities done in the sight of men—meant nothing, unless there was behind them the real desire to be obedient to God. Jesus observed the religious customs of His people with the most scrupulous care, but He told the woman of Samaria, "The Father seeketh those to worship Him who worship Him in spirit and in truth."[9]

Thus, in all His teaching, Jesus was trying to get men away from the idea of goodness as something that lies upon life's surface and works into it from the outside. He wanted them to see in it something that a man is. We ourselves are either good or bad, and it is our goodness, or badness, that gives goodness, or badness, to the things we do and say. They are the expression of our characters.

That was Christ's teaching, and when we turn from His words to His life, we find that teaching translated into action. We are

[9] John iv, 23.

so accustomed to the Gospel story that we can hardly realize just how a life like His must have appeared to the men who saw and knew Him. He defied the conventions of morals and religion, not because they were conventions, but because they became a hindrance to His work. There was no law that a pious Jew respected and kept more carefully than the law of the Sabbath-rest, but Jesus broke it, openly and publicly, when He healed the sick upon the Sabbath day. Good men looked on with amazement, when they saw this teacher, Who had said, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter the kingdom,"[10] doing things that no scribe or Pharisee would have dreamed of doing. He associated with open sinners, He dined with notorious characters; people said, "Behold a wine-bibber,"[11] "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."[12] Even His own disciples were astonished when they returned from Sychar and found Him talking with a Samaritan

[10] Matthew v, 20. [11] Matthew xi, 19.
[12] Luke xv, 2.

woman of somewhat more than doubtful reputation. Goodness, as we see it in the life of Jesus, is not a matter of rules and laws, but entirely a matter of character.

The second thing we learn from Jesus is that *goodness drives men to action.* It is motive-power, or it is nothing. There is no truly good character that does not somehow find an outlet in the doing of good deeds. There is no room in Christ's heaven for a do-nothing saint. That is the meaning of the parable of the talents; the man who took his trust-fund and buried it in the ground, so that he might be sure not to lose it, is cast into outer darkness, because he has been idle.[13] "Why call ye Me 'Lord, Lord,'" He asked once, "and do not the things that I say? Many shall say unto Me, 'Lord, Lord,' but I will say unto them, Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.'"[14] The saints will be known at the Last Judgment by the way that they have shown kindness to the sick and destitute.[15]

[13] Matthew xxv, 14-28. [14] Matthew vii, 21-23.
[15] Matthew xxv, 35, 36.

Christ's own life was one of incessant labor. He was driven from place to place, from task to task, by a great imperative, a "Must" that had its home in His own heart. It was a steady pressure from within that sent Him unweariedly about His daily occupations. "I must work the works of Him that sent me,"[16] was the motto of His life, and always He was trying to transplant that same imperative into the lives of other men. He wanted their goodness, like His own, to be a motive-power. In this, as in all else, the life of Jesus is the perfect interpretation of His law. The good man must do good things, not in order to be good, but because he is good. If his life fails to show a record of good deeds, it is because he himself has failed of goodness. But even the deeds that look as though they might be good are not so, unless they are the fruit of a good desire, for there are "prophets who come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."[17]

As we read these things in our New Testaments, they are all so plain and simple that

[16] John ix, 4. [17] Matthew vii, 15.

we wonder how anyone could think otherwise about them than just as Jesus thought; and yet there is perhaps no other single thing in all Christ's teaching that slips away from us so easily as this about the inwardness and the driving-power of goodness. Our minds are so taken up with the surface things, that our thoughts seldom enter the deeper-lying realm of motives, and when they do, it is a sort of voyage of discovery, where everything is strange. What we think of as our goodness is largely habit; our judgments of good and evil are mostly formed by rule; we apply the Ten Commandments to conduct, rarely to motive. And so it matters not how often we have heard Christ's idea of goodness taught, it comes to us, each time we meet it, as something like a new discovery. It is so different from our ordinary notion of goodness that we can understand why Jesus said, "The last shall be first, and the first last."[18]

But Jesus' teaching goes still farther. He was not satisfied with telling men that good-

[18] Matthew xx, 16.

ness is a quality of soul and a motive that drives men to action. For Jesus also showed very clearly what goodness really is. *It is godlikeness,* nothing else. He said, "Be ye therefore perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect."[19] That means two things. It means that we are to be good with a goodness that is complete as God's own; it also means that we are to be good with a goodness that is like God's own. To know what we ought to be, then, we must know what God is. When we are what God is, then we are good; but not till then, for goodness, righteousness, holiness are only names for godlikeness.

Here it is that the two sides of Jesus' teaching meet in a perfect harmony of purpose. We never know anything so long as we know it only by itself; we must know two things together in order to know either of them. We must know ourselves in order to know God; we must know God in order to know ourselves. Jesus has brought the world both kinds of knowledge. He has shown us ourselves as we might be, if we

[19] Matthew v, 48.

were entirely god-like. Human nature, as we see it in Him, is human nature at its possible best; and we must not forget that human nature ought always be at its best. He has also shown us God as He would be if He were a man; that is to say, He has shown us those aspects of God in which we can be like Him, that "image of God" in which man was created, and that is God's character.[20] Finally, He has showed us God and man together, because they belong together, God in man and man in God.

Goodness, then, is godlikeness. But what does that mean? What is it to be like God? When we go with that question to the teaching and the life of Christ, we get more than one answer. For one thing, to be like God is *to share God's purposes and have them for our own.* That was what Jesus meant when He taught His disciples to pray, "Thy will be done." We usually think of that petition as an expression of submission, as the acceptance of something that cannot be otherwise. In reality it is far more than that. It ought to be the voice of a great

[20] See Chapter IV.

desire, which cannot be satisfied until God's will is done always and everywhere. That is what the prayer meant in Jesus' life. When He prayed in Gethsemane, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt,"[21] He was doing something more than accepting the inevitable Cross, for He was steeling His will to follow to the end the will of God, which had always been His guide. Until we will what God wills, there is no goodness in us.

But then, at once, another question comes. What is God's will? How are we to know it? That question, too, has more than one answer. In the first place, all of us have *an inborn idea of what God's will must be.* We call it "inborn" because all of us have it, and none of us can trace it back to its beginnings. St. Paul calls it "a law written in our hearts."[22] There is no man living who has not some notion of the will of God, though he may not give it that name. Indeed, it is just because we all have this moral sense that we can form an idea of what God must be. We need no voice from heaven to tell us that certain things

[21] Matthew xxvi, 39. [22] Romans ii, 15.

are wrong and other things are right, that certain aims are high and other aims are low; and it lies in the very nature of things that God's aims are the highest aims.

Then, too, we all believe that *God's will has been made known* through the teaching of men in whom God Himself has lived. That was the ground of Christ's indictment of the Jews of His own day,—they had a knowledge of God's will, but they were not living by it; they had "Moses and the prophets," but they would not listen to them; they had all the knowledge that they needed to make them accept Him and His teaching, but they wilfully refused to do the very thing for which that knowledge had prepared them. He summed up the whole of human duty in two great commandments, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God—and thy neighbor as thyself"[23]; but both of these commmandments were already a part of their law,[24] and Jesus' accusation is that they do not live by the law they have; they are worse than the people of Nineveh, who re-

[23] Mark xii, 30, 31. [24] Deuteronomy vi, 5; Leviticus xix, 18.

pented when Jonah preached to them.[25] St. Paul repeats the same indictment. He says that there is no reason for a Jew to boast about his Scriptures unless He obeys the will of God, which he finds written there; the heathen have no Scriptures, but they are oftimes better than the Jews, who have them, because they live by what little knowledge of God's will they have.[26]

Finally, we learn God's will *from the life and teaching of Jesus.* Thus no man who has had an opportunity to be a Christian can excuse his lack of goodness because he did not know the will of God. He was born with it "written in his heart," he has heard it declared by prophets and lawgivers, he has had the chance to see it in Jesus Christ. Any failure to make God's will our own is our own failure, for which no one is to blame except ourselves.

To be like God is to share His purposes and make His will our own. And that means *to be unselfish.* For unselfishness is a quality of God. Jesus has taught us that

[25] Matthew xii, 41. [26] Romans ii, 13-29.

God is love, and unselfishness is just another name for love. Perhaps it were better to say that unselfishness is a name for one aspect, or one side, of love. It is love looked at from the point of view of self; for love, in the highest and the truest sense is the giving of self to someone else. Thus Jesus gave His whole life to others, and His giving was God's giving. In Him "God so loved the world that He gave His Son."[27]

Christ's view of His own self was that it existed not for its own sake, but as a sacrifice, as a possible blessing for others,—for any others and for all others. God's will, therefore, as we learn it from Christ, is the will to give Himself, and to be like God we, too, must have the will to give, the sacrificial will that is without a trace or taint of selfishness.

There is another reason, too, why godlikeness must mean unselfishness. When we make God's will our own, we have to limit our desires. Rising unbidden in the hearts of all of us are hopes and ambitions

[27] John iii, 16.

and longings that have to do only with self. We long for power, for wealth, for praise, for pleasure. We want these things not for the sake of others or to help us in the doing of God's will, but because they satisfy certain desires from which none of us is entirely free. Thus every man who strives to live the sacrificial life of God must pass through times of bitter conflict, times when his soul is torn between the longing for immediate, personal and selfish satisfactions and the honest wish to do the will of God. He has to repress these selfish natural desires in order to say to God sincerely, "Thy will be done." The very greatest Christians have felt most keenly this conflict between God's will and self-will, and it is the very greatest of them all who has described it best,—"When I would do good," says Paul, "evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind. The good that I would, I do not, and the evil that I would not, that I do."[28] It was this hard necessity

[28] Romans vii, 15-23.

for unselfishness in leading the life of God that Jesus had in mind, when He said, "Let a man deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." [29]

No one can deny the nobility and beauty of the character which Jesus lived and taught. It commands the admiration and respect even of those who never try to make it real in themselves. But men say it is impossible; it makes demands that are beyond men's powers; it makes no allowance for human weakness; it permits no compromise between godlikeness and selfishness. They say, "We grant that Jesus taught this, and thousands of Christian teachers have taught it after Him, but even Christians must admit that no one else than Jesus has ever lived it out, and He, you say, is God."

The answer to this is simple. It is true that no other man will ever live perfectly the life that Jesus lived, but that is no reason why men should not try. It is only by effort that we enlarge our powers; we need tasks that are beyond our strength, if

[29] Matthew xvi, 24.

we wish our strength to grow. If we never tried the hard things, each generation of men would be weaker than the one before it. We must go upward, or we must slip back, and Christ points the way to the mountain-top, which ought to be the goal of our desire.

But that is only a partial answer. The complete answer is that godlikeness can never be the character of men until they have God in their lives. The secret of the perfect character of Jesus is the perfect union of His human life with the life of God. "God was in Christ" explains it; nothing else does explain it. And so the ultimate lesson about humanity that Jesus has to teach is that it must fail in goodness utterly, apart from God. The life of God must enter our lives, if our lives are to be like His.

CHAPTER VI

Christ the Saviour

Jesus is more than the world's Teacher. When Christians wish to express the deepest feeling that they have for Christ, they call Him "Saviour," and from the beginning they have used the word "salvation" as a name for the greatest blessings which they have from Him. The word suggests an act of Christ. Something that He has done has saved us from some threatening danger, broken some chain, relieved some great distress of ours. Why should He be called the Saviour? What is this salvation that we have in Him.

Three thoughts lie, so to say, behind the word salvation, and explain our use of it. We are not always conscious of them, but they are always there.

The first of them is the thought of *sin*. Think for a moment about some of the

things that have been said already.[1] Human nature has two sides. All of us can catch the vision of the heights, and all of us know that it is on the heights that we belong; but all of us are conscious, too, of a force that draws us down from them when we essay to climb. Again, it is Jesus Who has made us conscious of the heights. All that He is, we ought to be, and are not. He shows us that there is something deeply and terribly wrong, not only with the world, but with and in ourselves. If it is the will of God that every man should be like Christ, then in every one of us God's will is daily suffering defeat. The perfection of Jesus we can never share. We cannot make God's will perfect in ourselves.

This, then, is sin. We use the word in more than one meaning. It is either failure to live the will of God, or it is a condition in ourselves which makes the failure inevitable. It is the force that is always dragging us away from the will of God; it is the power that is constantly thwarting our desire to make His character our own. It

[1] See Chapters II and V.

is universal. The man does not exist who is free from it. As we look back over our own lives we cannot remember a time when it was not with us; as we consider the lives of others, even of little children, we see the traces of it there.

When we come to ask, What is the nature of this sin? we find that it is always selfishness. It is the setting of another will against the will of God. Something within us always makes us want a character different from that of God. God's life is giving, our natural impulse always is to take; God's life is for us, our lives are naturally for ourselves; our lives and God's life belong together, in actual fact they are apart. And that is sin.

The second thing that enters into our idea of salvation is the notion of *responsibility*. We are answerable for what we are. If we fail of the great purpose of life, we have to bear the penalty of failure. The more we know about life's purpose, the more complete is the disaster, if that purpose is not reached. The fact that sin is

universal among men, the circumstance "that all men have sinned and come short of God's glory,"[2] does not change the ultimate result. It only means that larger numbers are involved in the penalty which falls on those who miss the mark. All the truth that Jesus has taught, all the insight into the purposes of God that we can gain from those men into whose hearts He has put His law, all the instruction that comes from the inborn law, which serves as a standard for the common conscience,—all this only goes to heighten the contrast between what we are and what we ought to be. It merely adds to our responsibility. "If I had not come," said Jesus, "they would not have had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin."[3] "That servant which knew his Lord's will," He said again, "and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes, and that servant which knew not his Lord's will, and did it not, shall be beaten with few stripes."[4] We cannot escape responsibility by pleading ignorance, for our conscience tells us that we

[2] Romans iii, 23. [3] John xv, 22.
[4] Luke xii, 47, 48.

have never lived out the will of God that we know.

The third thought that enters into our idea of salvation is the conviction of *immortality*. Others than Christians hold that belief, and it takes many forms in the minds of different men. Christians connect it with the resurrection of the body, others think of it as merely a continuance of the spiritual part of man after the body has been laid aside, but it is only a rare and occasional individual who really and completely believes that the thing which we call death ends everything for him who dies. Now believing, as we do, in the continuance of life, we think of that "world to come" as the place where the penalty of sin will be inflicted. The man who would not have God here, cannot have Him there; selfishness will have its perfect work; the downward tendencies of human nature will work themselves out to utter misery. That is the final penalty of sin.

These three thoughts, therefore form the

background of our notion of salvation,—sin, responsibility and immortality. From sin, and from its consequences, Christ has saved us. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus (which means, 'God is salvation'), for He shall save His people from their sins"[5] was the message that announced His advent. "God gave His Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"[6] is St. John's summary of the Gospel. "Believe and be saved" is the cry with which the missionaries of the Cross have been going up and down the world for almost nineteen hundred years. That is what we mean, when we speak of Christ the Saviour.

And then, at once, the question arises, How was this done? What has made Jesus the Saviour of the world? The answering of that question leads us into the deepest mystery of the Christian faith, it makes us think of God as related, somehow, to human sin. We cannot answer it without a backward look upon the life of Christ.

From the time when His public ministry began, it was a life of sorrow. We may

[5] Matthew i, 21. [6] John iii, 16.

well believe that it was not without its hours of joy. "When men shall revile you," He said, "and persecute you, then rejoice and be exceeding glad"[7]; and who shall say that the heart of Jesus did not know that gladness? "There is joy in the presence of the angels," He said again, "over one sinner that repenteth"[8]; and who shall deny to Him that joy? But it was, after all, a joy in the things that men count sorrow. We know that Jesus wept, but nowhere is it written that He laughed. It was a life of self-denial. From the time of the Temptation, on to the end, He was constantly refusing things that He might have had. More than once He fled so that He might not be taken by force and made a king. And then, at last, that blameless, holy life went out in bitter pain and deep disgrace, in the long torture of the Cross, amid the studied insults of a jeering crowd. He died a criminal's death. It is a tragedy, the saddest that history knows.

But all through the life of Jesus, as we read it in the Gospels, there runs a single

[7] Matthew v, 11, 12. [8] Luke xv, 10.

dominant idea. He is here to do the will of God. He is convinced that God's purpose cannot be reached except through His suffering and self-denial. Therefore they, too, are included in the Father's will, and because they are God's will, He accepts them. He makes them His own desire, and the conscious purpose of His life focusses upon the Cross. "I have a baptism to be baptised with," He says, "And how am I straitened until it be accomplished."[9] He is conscious of an imperative of suffering, as well as an imperative of goodness, and He accepts them both in obedience to His Father's will. "He became obedient, even so far as to die; nay, to die the death of the Cross."[10] "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?"[11] was a question that could have, for Him, only one answer. Therefore He sees His Passion as a triumph; the shame and the disgrace of it are, for Him, a glory. His life was one of progressive sacrifice, and the Cross was its culmination, the finishing of

[9] Luke xii, 50. [10] Philippians ii, 8.
[11] John xviii, 11.

His work, the final gift of God's unselfishness to men.

From the earliest days, all Christians have connected Christ's death with the salvation of the world. It was sin that caused it,—not His sin, for He was sinless; but the sin that blinded men to His real greatness and made them refuse to acknowledge Him as Lord. "God was in Christ," but the world did not see God in Him. It treated Him as a criminal and visited on Him the punishment that it reserved for the lowest and the vilest of mankind. It made Him an outcast, "shamefully entreated Him" and crucified Him between two thieves.

Thus God descended to the lowest depths of earthly shame and became man's partner in the sorrow and the suffering that comes of sin, in this disordered world. There is no consequence of sin that God, in Jesus, has not shared; there is no plane of human experience, however remote from the blessedness and joy that come of goodness, that God, in Christ has not stood upon it, by man's side. He has taken into His own life

all the consequences of human selfishness. "He that knew no sin was made sin for us."[12]

That is why we can say that in His whole life, and especially in His Passion, He was enduring the penalty of sin. God became subject to His own law; the sinless man stood in the place of sinners. He suffered as though He had been the guiltiest of men. No thunderbolt struck down His false accusers; no blast of almighty power withered the arms that scourged Him, or the hands that nailed Him to the Cross; there was no miracle on Calvary, though the people that stood by half-expected one. On the contrary, Christ accepted the penalty. The bitter hardness of it we can partly measure by the "sweat, as it were great drops of blood," upon His brow in Gethsemane, and by the cry of desolation from the Cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"[13] But hard though it was, Christ chose it as His own. "No man taketh My life from Me," was the way He spoke of it, "I lay it down of Myself."[14]

[12] II Corinthians v, 21. [13] Matthew xxvii, 46.
[14] John x, 18.

Thus Christ became the Saviour of the world; not only by suffering, but by choosing to suffer. "Atonement," "ransom," "reconciliation," "propitiation," "redemption," —these are the words in which the New Testament writers seek to express the value of that obedience of the Saviour to His Father's will, which extended even as far as the Cross. They connect with ideas common in the thought of Jesus' day, but far less common in our own. They need explanation nowadays to make their meaning clear, for they deal with notions of sacrifice found in the Jewish law, found also, in some measure, in the worship of the heathen deities. We do not need to follow these terms to their sources in order to understand that this descent of God to sorrow, this suffering by Jesus of the penalty of sin, was something done for us. He has done for us what we could never have done for ourselves. The great sacrifice has been made. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."[15]

Now what does all this mean? It means,

[15] Romans v, 8.

for one thing, that sin is not a trifling, but an awful, a deadly thing. It is not something to be taken for granted because it is so common, and therefore made light of and excused, but it is something to be loathed and abhorred and fought and crushed. It is a thing so powerful that when God wished to conquer it, the means He had to take was the suffering and agony and death of Jesus Christ. The Cross is the emblem of victory, but of victory that is won in bitter struggle and at awful cost. To conquer sin in his own life should be the dearest wish of every man who has looked upon the Cross of Christ, for it is sin that defeats the will of God, insults His love, separates men from Him, and makes godlikeness impossible.

It also means that the fear of penalty is gone. The thought of God as an angry Being, as a stern and exacting Master, scanning His servants' work with hand upraised to strike,—that thought is gone forever from the mind of the man who has stood beneath the Cross and read the true meaning of what happened upon Calvary. In its place we have the thought of the loving Father,

Who is all forgiveness. The world, since Christ, is a saved world. Of course not every individual in the world escapes, or will escape, the penalty of sin. Men are still held to answer for what they are and what they do. Indeed, the salvation of the world by Christ has added a new responsibility to those that men had before Christ came. We have to answer for the way we treat God's love. So there are men in whom sin is even now working out its own punishment, which will be completed in the life beyond. They are the men who are not willing to be saved. For them even God can do nothing. But since Christ lived and died no man needs to spend his life in fear of punishment to come, for "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." We can tell that to every man that lives, and with it we can say, as St. Paul said, "Therefore be ye reconciled to God."[16]

And that takes all the fear out of life. There is nothing left to be afraid of,—not "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or

[16] II Corinthians v, 19, 20.

famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword," for "in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us."[17] The only thing we need to fear is the sin within ourselves, for it may still rise up and drive God out, and leave us worse than vanquished. It is therefore very humbly, but very thankfully and happily, that Christians give to Christ the name of Saviour.

[17] Romans viii, 35, 37.

CHAPTER VII

Faith

The religion of Jesus Christ is a religion of faith. Faith is the first demand that Christ makes of those who would be Christians, and of those who would be known as Christians it is required that they profess faith in Christ.

The name "Christian" is foreign to the New Testament. We meet it only three times in all the twenty-seven books.[1] St. Luke tells us that it was at first a nickname. The New Testament speaks of Christians as "disciples," or "pupils," of Jesus, but oftener it calls them simply "believers." The difference between Christians and other people is that they "believe" and others do not. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ"—that is, have faith in Him—"and ye shall be saved" has been the message of all the Christian

[1] Acts xi, 26; xxvi, 28; I Peter iv, 16.

preachers from St. Peter's day to our own.

Naturally, the New Testament has much to say about faith. "We are justified by faith";[2] "by grace are ye saved through faith";[3] "Christ dwells in your hearts by faith,"[4]—these are but a few of the things that Paul tells us; and St. John says that the reason why he wrote his Gospel was "that ye might believe, and believing, might have life."[5] If we were to gather together all the passages in the New Testament that speak of faith, we would easily conclude faith is the greatest word in the whole Christian vocabulary. A Christian is a man of faith; he becomes a Christian when faith enters his life; he ceases to be a Christian when faith departs. Without faith there is no Christianity, no Church, no fellowship of man with God, no real brotherhood of man with men.

Now it is just the great words of human language which have the most tragic history. They are the words which are oftenest abused and misused. Only think of the

[2] Romans v, 1. [3] Ephesians ii, 5. [4] Ephesians iii, 17. [5] John xx, 31.

words "love" and "liberty," and the wrongs which they have been made to cover and excuse. It would be a miracle if the word "faith" had not been similarly misused and misapplied. This has happened, not once or twice, but many times; indeed, it is happening all the time. We have reason to believe that it was happening even while the Apostles were still preaching the first message of the Gospel.

The trouble is that the word "faith" can have more than one meaning. When we use it, we do not always stop to think just which of these meanings we intend, and so our thought of faith becomes confused. Part of the trouble comes, of course, from the fact that we do not speak the language of the men who wrote the New Testament. In that language, which was Greek, "to believe" and "to have faith" are one word; so are "belief" and "faith." But the whole difficulty does not lie there, as we shall see.

If some one were to ask you what you mean by faith, you would probably tell him that it means "belief," and you might point

out to him that its opposite is "unbelief." That would be true only in part; it might convey a wholly wrong idea of what faith is. For belief may be any one of three things,—belief *of* something, belief *about* something, or belief *in* something. Those three ideas are quite different. Tell a man about the government of the United States, explain to him how it is organized, how it operates, what are its principles. He says, "I believe that", and that is "belief"; he believes what he has been told. Or he says, "I believe it is a good government"; that, too, is "belief"; he believes something about the government. Or he says, "I believe in that kind of a government"; that also is "belief", but only this last kind of belief is faith.

Thousands of people are repeating every Sunday the words of the Apostles' Creed. They say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." Many of them mean, "I believe that there is an almighty God, Who has made heaven and earth"; that is belief, but it is not faith; the devils share that belief. People say, "I

believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord," and only mean that they believe Jesus to be the Son of God; again, that is belief, but it is not faith. In the same way, people say, "I believe in the Bible," when they really mean, "I believe that what the Bible says is true"; once more that is belief, but it is not faith.

Of course, all these different kinds of belief have something to do with faith. It is not possible for us to believe in God, unless we believe that there is a God, or to believe in Christ unless we believe that He is the Son of God. But when we give the name of faith to that kind of believing, we are in danger of losing the true meaning of faith entirely. Certainly it was not that kind of belief that Paul had in mind when he says, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God."[6]

To make the confusion even worse, we have gradually come to use the word "faith" in still another sense. We use it to describe the things we hold to be true. We speak of the Christian faith and the Jewish faith

[6] Romans v, 1.

and the Mohammedan faith; of the Roman faith and the Protestant faith, of the faith of the Turks and the Hindus and the Japanese. All this goes to show how much we are in need of some clear and definite idea about the true meaning of this word "faith."

We shall best get that idea, if we remember that "to have faith" means *to believe in somebody or something.* It means to have confidence in someone or something. Faith is trust. When a man says, "I have no faith in the League of Nations," he means that he is not willing to trust the future of the world to such an organisation. When he says, "I believe in democracy," he means that he is sure that the principles of democracy will ultimately secure to the world the largest measure of justice, happiness and civic righteousness. When he says, "I believe in my physician," he means that he is convinced of his physician's skill and judgment; he proves his faith by putting his life in the physician's hands.

These are illustrations of what faith is, for when the New Testament speaks of

faith, it means just this and nothing else. When the leper came to Jesus and said, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean,"[7] he was confessing his faith. He was sure that Jesus had the power to help him, and was willing to leave the cure to Him. When the Roman captain said, "Speak the word, and my servant shall be healed," Jesus said, "Even in Israel I have not found such faith."[8] The soldier was so sure of Jesus that he asked only His word. When the disciples were afraid that their boat was going to sink, Jesus called them "men of little faith,"[9] because they had not been willing to trust Him. Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount may be summed up, "God is your Father; then why not treat Him as children ought to treat a father, and leave your lives in His hands?" That is faith.

It would be good for all of us, if we were now and then to repeat the Apostles' Creed, changing the words a little, and saying, "I put my trust in God the Father Almighty—

[7] Matthew viii, 2.
[8] Matthew viii, 8, 10.
[9] Matthew viii, 26.

and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord—and in the Holy Ghost." That would not change the real meaning of the Creed, but only make it clear.

It would be still better if we were oftener to remember how Christian faith had its first beginnings. To a few fishermen on the shore of the sea of Galilee there came, one day, a stranger, who said to them, "Follow Me." They knew but little about Him, but what they did know gave them confidence enough to go with Him. That was their first act of faith in Christ. As they lived with Him day by day, saw what He did and heard what He said, their confidence grew stronger and deeper. He gained an ever firmer hold upon their lives. They found Him trustworthy, and because they found Him so, they trusted Him. The more they trusted Him, the better they knew Him; the better they knew Him, the more they trusted Him; and so they went from faith to faith.

At first it was only for a place to sleep and for food to eat that they trusted Him, but by and by they came to trust Him for far greater things than these,—for knowl-

edge of God, for power to do God's will, for forgiveness of their sins. When at last He was taken from them, and "a cloud received Him out of their sight," they were still believers in Him, and as believers, as men who trusted Christ, they went out everywhere to persuade others also to believe in Him, to trust Him, even as they trusted Him themselves.

They told these others the story of His life, His death, His Resurrection, and Ascension; they told them of the promises that He had left them; they told them how they themselves had learned to think of Him as God. They tried to convince these others that He is still to be trusted, that what He said is still to be held for truth, that the only right way to think of God is the way that He has taught. They tried to make these others feel that because of what He is, and because of what He has done, Christ is the rightful Lord of every man's life, and that loyalty to Christ is man's first duty. Their one great purpose, in all this preaching and teaching, was to make those who heard them "believers in Jesus Christ," that is, men of

faith, who have confidence in Him and are willing to trust Him and the Father Whom He has taught men to know.

That is Christian faith,—not belief of or about anybody, but belief in Jesus Christ, confidence in Him, willingness to trust Him. And that means the acceptance of His lordship over our lives. Of course it also means confidence in God and trust in Him, and that carries with it the duty of obedience and loyal service. Unless this trust and confidence are truly present in a man's life, and unless he is ready to prove their presence by his loyalty, he has not real right to say, "I believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord." Thus it is possible to believe everything that the Bible says, and yet remain an unbeliever, a man without faith.

With this simple meaning of the word "faith" clear in our minds, it is easy to see why the New Testament makes so much of it. We can understand why it is written that "in Nazareth Jesus did not many mighty works, because of their unbelief"; the people did not trust Him, and He could do nothing for them. We can understand why He

wept so sorrowfully over Jerusalem; He had wanted to help the people there by teaching them to see God as He is, but when He tried they were unwilling to listen, they had not trusted Him. The presence of Jesus could bring no blessing to those who had no faith. We can also understand why St. Paul can say that "we are justified by faith."

But that brings us directly to another question. This faith, of which we have been speaking, what does it do? What is its value to the man who has it? The question has many answers, for faith does many things, works many changes in the life it enters, but all the answers may be summed up in a single sentence,—*Faith takes what Christ gives.* A faith that was perfect, if there were such a thing as perfect faith, would take all that Christ gives; a faith that is imperfect takes in the measure of its perfectness. When a man's faith is weak, he takes only a little of all that he might have from Christ; as his faith grows stronger he gets more and more. Two illustrations will make this clear.

For one thing, faith takes *Jesus' teaching.* In this place we are not concerned with what that teaching is.[10] It deals with God, with sin, with righteousness, with the nature and destiny of men. Much of it cannot be proved. It lies outside the limits of experience; it is concerned with truth that we cannot discover by ordinary human means. Such things we cannot prove. When things of this kind are told us, we can do only one of two things,—either believe them, taking the word of him who tells us, or refuse to believe them, because we will not take his word. The man of faith, who trusts Christ, takes His word for many things and confidently waits for the proof to come in Christ's own time.

There are many things in Jesus' teaching that do not seem to square with the facts of life as we have learned them from experience. It is not always easy to believe, for example, that God is love. There are times when it seems that He is hard and cruel. But the man who has learned to trust Christ keeps on believing it anyhow, for Christ has

[10] See Chapters IV and V.

taught him this, and he is sure that, sooner or later, he will find it so, even in his own experience. So, too, it is not always easy to believe in a life beyond the grave. The brutal fact of death seems to contradict it flatly. But the man who puts his trust in Christ is not worried by that contradiction, and lives on in expectation of a life to come. Thus faith gives us balance and ballast and stability.

There is another thing faith does, of which St. Paul is never tired of speaking. It takes *salvation*. Of what salvation is we have spoken in another place.[11] It is forgiveness and the power to lead a life of increasing holiness here in this world; it is perfectness and happiness hereafter. This salvation Jesus has offered to all the world. Any man may have it, but only because of what Christ is and what Christ has done. But the only way to receive that salvation is to take it from Him in faith, humbling ourselves, forgetting ourselves, and opening our lives to the entrance of the power of God. When we do that we have our sal-

[11] See Chapter VI.

vation. It is given to us now and here. "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God"[12] is the way Paul puts it. When he says that we are "justified by faith," he means the same thing. Because we have taken, in humble trust on Him, the blessing that the Saviour offers us, we have no longer any reason to be afraid of God or of His judgment.

And there is still another thing faith does for us. It opens our lives to be the dwelling-place of Christ Himself. For Christ does live in those who are His humble and faithful people. He is not only God above us and around us; He is God within us. Through the men of faith, the men who trust Him and accept Him and obey Him as their Lord, He still is working, and always will be working, in the world. "Christ liveth in me, and the life which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God,"[13] says Paul; and in one of the great visions of the Revelation, John heard Christ saying, "Behold I stand at the

[12] Ephesians ii, 8. [13] Galatians ii, 20.

door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him."[14]

Thus it is only through faith that we become godlike. It is our faith which makes it possible for us to be the loyal and obedient children of the Heavenly Father, the "sons of God,"[15] as Paul calls Christian men, through whom and in whom the Heavenly Father's will is done "on earth as it is in heaven."

[14] Revelation iii, 20. [15] Galatians iv, 6.

CHAPTER VIII

The Holy Ghost

In the Apostles' Creed we all confess, "I believe in the Holy Ghost," just as we confess, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, our Lord." From the earliest days Christians have been baptising, as Jesus taught them, "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Why should this be? Why the three names of God? The answer is found partly in some of the things that Jesus said, partly in the experience of Christians.

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus was preparing His disciples for the separation that was soon to come.[1] He told them that when He was gone, He would send them "another Comforter"; so, at least, our English Bible renders the words

[1] John xiv-xvi.

that Jesus used. But when we go back to the language in which the New Testament is written, we find that the One Whom He promised to send them is called not "Comforter," but "Helper." He told them that this Helper would "guide them into all truth"; that He would quicken their memories of Him, would "bear witness" to Him; that He would make them strong to carry the burdens that life would lay upon them. Jesus called this Helper "the Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost," "the Spirit of Truth." As we read what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit, His meaning becomes very clear. The Spirit will take up His work and carry it on to the end of time. It is a promise.

After Christ's Ascension, the disciples who had received that promise were convinced that it had been fulfilled. They found themselves in possession of powers which they had not had before. Their minds were clearer about the meaning of all that they had seen in Jesus and heard from Him; they had a firmer grip upon the tasks which Christ had left for them to perform; they

were stronger to perform those tasks; things were happening in their lives which they could not explain and which they could never have brought to pass by themselves. Thinking of these things, they knew that God was working in them and using them to do His work, and remembering the promise that Christ had made, they said, "It is the Holy Ghost."

Their belief in the Holy Spirit was deepened as the years went by. Before their very eyes, God was working miracles. The greatest of these miracles was none of the things that we commonly call by that name, not the healing of the sick and the raising of the dead, and the unexplained opening of prison-doors. It was the conversion of men to Christ. They were poor and, for the most part, unlearned men, and Jesus had given them a commission which on other lips than His would have seemed absurd. He had told them to go out and "make disciples of all nations."[2] Because He had told them to do it, they went out and preached, and were

[2] Matthew xxviii, 19.

themselves astonished at the results. At first it was only to their own people that they spoke of Jesus, but by and by Paul came and "labored more abundantly than they all." Jews and Greeks and Romans, and that great mixed population which thronged the cities around the Mediterranean Sea, heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and by the hundreds and the thousands they turned away from their old religions, from their idols and their superstitions and their immoralities, and became members of the Christian churches that sprang up everywhere. A power was at work that was greater than the power of Paul and Barnabas and Silas and Peter and Timothy and the other missionaries who were telling the world of Christ. Still remembering the promise of Jesus to send them "another Helper," they said, "It is the Holy Spirit."

And then, as time went on, they saw unfolding in these new converts the same kind of powers that they themselves possessed. They saw an active, zealous, consecrated life growing up in these groups of Christians who had been converted through their

preaching. They saw men who had been heathen ready to make all kinds of sacrifices and to resist the bitterest persecutions for the name of Jesus. They saw them filled with missionary zeal; they saw them doing the impossible; and once more they said, "It is the Holy Spirit; Christ has fulfilled His promise; He has sent us another Helper to carry His work forward; it is God."

Perhaps in thinking thus about the way men first came to believe in the Holy Ghost, we have begun to get some idea of the importance which the Holy Spirit must have for our own lives. The idea will become still clearer, if we remember some of the things that have been said before. God has set us a great task. It is His will that we shall be like Him. He has shown us, in Jesus, what this likeness is. We cannot plead ignorance to excuse our failure; and yet we fail, we are not godlike. The reason for the failure lies very deep in human nature. Sin is embedded there, and that same sin is always hindering our advance toward God. Even when sin has been forgiven—and we

know that God is ready to forgive—it is still there, making us desire the things God hates, and forbidding us to love the things that God desires. Our growth toward God is a continual conflict in which we are meeting repeated defeats. The thing that God demands of us is too hard, far too hard, for our strength.

It is here that this truth about God the Holy Ghost finds its place. It tells us that we must not give up because God's purpose is too high and His will too hard. We have a Helper Who carries on the work of Christ, doing for us the things that Jesus did for His disciples while He walked with them the roads of Palestine. His work is done in hidden and secret ways, but some of the results of it we can clearly see.

Here, for example, is a man who has become a believer in Christ. Let us imagine him in heathen surroundings, growing up to manhood without hearing so much as the name of Jesus. One day he has heard someone speaking about this Christ. He has been interested, has wanted to know something more about this Saviour of the world.

His conscience has at last been roused; he has felt that he needs this Saviour for himself. Little by little he has come to think of Jesus as the One Who is entitled, above all others, to his trust and loyal service. Faith has entered his life; he sees everything differently,—God, his fellow-man, duty, everything. It is just as though some new life had been born within him, with new hopes and desires and purposes. It is all so new and wonderful, so different from what has been before, that he cannot believe that he is himself the author of it. It must be God Himself Who has put this faith into his heart. When that man says, "I believe in the Holy Ghost," he is speaking of One Who is very near and very real to him.

Now multiply that experience by many thousands, and you will have a history of Christian faith. Jesus said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."[3] Everywhere that you find a true believer in Jesus Christ, a man of faith, who is living a life of trust and loyalty, you will find a man who has been "born again." He

[3] John iii, 3.

may not, like the man we have been imagining, have grown to manhood apart from Christ. On the contrary, he may have learned to know Christ from his earliest childhood and his faith may be older than his first conscious memory, but at some point in his life God has entered it and made it a new life. It is the work of God the Holy Ghost. We call it His work of "regeneration." Every Christian who can clearly see his own past life, must find signs everywhere to show that God the Helper has been working there.

But that is not all. Even when we have been "born again" to the higher and the better life that is in Christ, we find that this new living is not easy. The path may be plain enough, but it is hard to keep the path. Obstacles are always rising in the way, and scarcely has the first been overcome before another looms up before us. That is what Jesus meant when He said that the way which leads to death is broad and easy and the way which leads to life is narrow and hard. Even Christ Himself had to pass through Gethsemane and over the hill of Calvary to glory.

And worst of all is the conflict which the new birth begins within ourselves. One moment our faith is strong and firm; we feel that nothing can shake our loyalty to Christ and our devotion to His purposes, the next moment we have forgotten all about Him, and are acting as though we had never felt the touch of His power upon our lives. Natural impulse points one way and duty points another; we have to curb our inclinations and force ourselves to do things that we are naturally averse from doing. In actual fact this new-born man is not one man, but two. There is a power within us that would drag us down, and that power is a part of us; there is a power within us that would raise us up, and that power too, is a part of us. The two are fighting; now one and now the other has the upper hand; and the battle lasts as long as life itself endures. The best men are most vividly conscious of it; no one ever felt it more bitterly than Paul. The more our hearts are set upon the doing of God's will, the more keenly do we feel the opposition of this rival power.

And here again is work for God the Holy Ghost. It is His power that must check the downward pull of sin. His work is not over when men are "born again," for the new-born life would quickly die, if left to fight its own way against evil impulse and sinful habit. The new birth is, indeed, only the beginning of His work, and the battle that goes on within us is only a part of God's long fight against the power of sin. Therefore when a man perceives that little by little the new life is winning over the old, when he sees that "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance"[4] are gradually overcoming "the works of the flesh," he knows that God is still working for him and in him. Then very humbly and very thankfully he confesses, "I believe in the Holy Ghost."

"Walk by the Spirit," said St. Paul, "and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh."[5] The Spirit's work is to "sanctify," to make men holy. He is God the Helper, living in men and working in them. That is why St. Paul could tell the Christians of Corinth that

[4] Galatians v, 22, 23. [5] Galatians v, 16.

even their bodies were "temples of the Holy Ghost."[6]

Father, Son, Holy Spirit,—by these three names Christians have learned to think of God and speak of God. Yet we believe that there is and can be only one God. Therefore, because they knew Him as one God working in these three ways, Christians of long ago made a new word with which to say that Father, Son and Spirit are three, and yet are One. The word they made, and the word that we still use, is "Trinity." No one imagines that it tells us all there is of God to know. All that it does is just to sum up in a word the knowledge that we have through Christ. The life of God reaches beyond the farthest boundary of human imagination. It may be that in another world there will be many names and other names and better names to tell of what He is.

[6] I Corinthians vi, 19.

CHAPTER IX

Means of Grace

When once a man has become a real Christian, a true believer in Jesus Christ, he is very sure that his faith, like every other good thing in his life, has come to him from God. When he finds within himself a genuine desire to become godlike, he is certain that God has given him that desire. If he finds a new power within his life, turning it toward God, he is convinced that it is God's own power. He believes with St. Paul, "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."[1]

He wants that grace, too, to come to other men. He is eager to have them share in this great possession which has become his own. Like St. Paul, once more, he "longs after them in the mercies of Jesus Christ."[2] And so, in order that he may be clear about

[1] Ephesians ii, 8. [2] Philippians i, 8.

the way salvation has come to him, and in order that he may be able to bring that same salvation to other men, he asks, "How is this done? What are the means God uses to bring the love and mercy of Jesus Christ to the souls of men?"

The natural place for us to look for an answer to those questions would be, of course, our own experience. We can go back over our own lives and try to learn when, where and how God has touched them with His power and entered upon and begun to change them into likeness to His own. Then we can compare our own experience with that of other Christians. If we can find one single means that God has used to enter the lives of many men and give them faith and righteousness, we shall have the right to say, "That is the way God works."

To be sure that road to the knowledge we are seeking is full of difficulties. The longer we follow it, the more we are reminded of Jesus' word,—"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence

it cometh or whither it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit."[3] It is hard for any one of us to point back to a definite moment in his life and say, "That is when I became a Christian"; for many good Christians it is impossible. It is just as hard to pick out certain happenings from among the many that have marked our past and say, "God did that for me." The leadings of our own hearts are the hardest of all things for us to understand. The life of God has touched the lives of most of us from their very earliest beginnings; few of us, perhaps, can remember a time when we were not, in some sense, Christians; not many of us are ever entirely outside the influence of the Holy Ghost. And yet there are some things in our own experience of faith about which we can be very sure.

One of them is that *our faith has come to us through the agency of other men.* It has not been produced by any sudden miracle from on high. Even the blinding revelation that turned a Saul from his path of perse-

[3] John iii, 8.

cution and made him the first great missionary of the Cross, came to him only after he had formed the acquaintance of Christians and heard the preaching of the Gospel he was trying to destroy. Our faith, too, has not been a solitary faith. It has not come to us apart from other men. We may have been alone when we first became conscious of it, but somewhere along our path of life the touch of some Christian life must have lain, if only for a moment, upon our own.

We may not be able to say with any certainty just who those men are at whose fire of faith the flame of our own faith has been lighted. In these days, and in Christian lands, most of us are Christians because our parents have been Christians, and they have had much to do with the beginnings of our faith. But there are numberless other men who may have had a part in it. Now it is a pastor, whose preaching has opened our eyes more widely upon the great truths in which God lives; again, it is a friend, a teacher, a wife or a husband, sometimes it is a child, who has made God and his good-

ness more real to us, though the revelation may have been but for a moment. It is in a host of fleeting contacts, in each of which we feel for an instant the touch of another Christian life, that our Christian faith, and with it our Christian life, has grown up. In that touch something passed from them to us, as power went out of Jesus when the woman touched the border of His cloak,[4] and we know and are certain that that something is divine. It is through this constantly repeated touch of the lives of other men in whom God dwells that God touches our own lives. Our first answer to the question, "How does God work?" must, therefore, be, "He works through men."

Another thing we find to be always true. The men and women whose words and deeds have helped us to faith and righteousness *have been themselves believers in Jesus Christ,* or have professed to be. It is the people who have allowed the world to know that they were Christians that have Christianised the world. It is written of

[4] Luke viii, 46.

Peter and John, that when they were arrested in Jerusalem, the members of the Jewish court which tried them, "took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus."[5] They realized that they were Christians after they had seen their conduct and heard them speak. The disciples were simply fulfilling the Saviour's command, "Ye shall be My witnesses."[6]

So it has always been. In the dark days when to be a Christian was held to be a crime against the Roman State, a Christian writer tells us that "the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church." When heathen persecutors saw the genuineness of the faith that made men willing to die, but unwilling to deny their Lord and Saviour, it started many of them on the road to faith. All the Christians in the world to-day are Christians because others have made it known that they were believers in Jesus Christ. Through all the centuries of Christian history runs a line of witnesses who have testified to other men that they believed in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ, His Son,

[5] Acts iv, 13. [6] Acts i, 8.

and in the Holy Ghost. Through this line of witnesses, our faith is linked back across the years with the faith of the men who left their homes by the Sea of Galilee nineteen centuries ago, to be the followers and companions of the Christ. If that line of witnesses had ever been broken, there would be no Gospel in the world to-day. In lands where it was broken, as in Africa and certain parts of Asia, there was no Christianity for a thousand years. It is through believers, who preach and teach and testify, that faith is kept upon the earth. If our faith were to become the silent and secret possession of our own hearts, the line of Christians would soon become extinct. "No man," said Jesus, "lighteth a candle and putteth it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house."[7]

A third thing, also, we find to be true. Christians, who testify to Christ, are convinced that they are proclaiming *a truth which comes from God Himself.* It is not

[7] Matthew v, 15.

merely opinion or tradition, but has a higher source than the minds of men. Men have preached it, but they have not invented it or discovered it; they have spoken it and written it and sung it and lived it, but it is not theirs, for it is God's own. God has made Himself known, and this truth is His revelation. Its power to bring peace into troubled lives and comfort into sorrowful lives and power into feeble lives is proof that it is not of men. They call it the "Word of God." Through this word, spoken into men's ears or lived out before men's eyes, God brings men to believe in Him, and in His Son, Jesus Christ. We are "born again by the word of God."[8]

And that brings us to the fourth thing that we learn. Our faith is *connected with the Bible*. That does not mean that we become Christians by the actual reading of its pages. It is possible that we may have believed in God, and in Jesus Christ His Son, long before we had learned to read at all. It may be, too, that our faith has been nour-

[8] I Peter i, 23.

ished far more by spoken than by written words, by sermons and prayers and hymns more than by the reading of the Scriptures. And yet the fact remains that the testimony of faith, which wins our allegiance for Christ, does always go back to the Bible. The facts, the truths, the ideas which have formed our faith are those which are set down in permanent form in the Christian Scriptures. When we want to know what the Gospel really is, it is there that we look for knowledge. When we need to assure ourselves that God is really our loving Father, Whom we can trust amid all the changes of the world, we go back to the Bible to learn what the men who wrote it learned from Christ. When, at some perplexing moment, we need to know just what our duty is or feel the need of strength to do the duty that we see, we go back again to those old Scriptures, where we find the Word of God. We find, too, that the men whose testimony to Christ has been most fruitful in the making and training of Christians have always been those to whom the Scriptures have meant the most.

At every stage in our Christian progress, then, our lives are made and moulded by the power which comes through the Scriptures and which we get from them, either directly or through other men who found it there. Without the Bible there could be no Church, no preaching of the Gospel. Sixteen hundred years ago, when the Emperors of Rome were making their last tremendous effort to drive Christianity out of the world, they made a law that all the Christian Scriptures should be seized and burned. They had learned, what Christians already knew, that if they could succeed in destroying the Bible, they would conquer Christianity. The authentic story of the life of Jesus and the authentic record of the words He spoke would have perished, and in its place there would have been only a tradition of a wonderful life, which would have grown dim with time and become deformed by legend; the testimony of St. Paul and St. Peter and St. John would have been lost forever; the history of that long leading through which God prepared the way for Christ would have gone out of human

memory, and over the whole religion of the Christians the shadow of unreality would have fallen.

The Bible is the record of the showing-forth of God, of a process that began long centuries before Christ came, and reached its full completion in Him. It is the original testimony to Christ. Therefore we, who are Christians, esteem it differently from all other books. To us it seems to come from God; we can explain it in no other way. In it we seem to hear God speaking, speaking of Himself, of men, of righteousness, of sin, of love, of faith, of hope. We call it "God's Word." And yet, we know that it is also man's word, written by men no different from ourselves. And so, in order that we may give some name to the power which made it possible for men to write the Word of God, we say that these men were "inspired."

We began this chapter with the question, "What means does God use to bring His love and mercy in Jesus Christ home to the souls of men?" Now we can answer it. The

means God uses is His Word, written in the Scriptures, drawn from the Scriptures into the lives of men, and preached and lived by them. That is what we mean when we call the Word of God "the means of grace."

But for many centuries Christians have been speaking of other means of grace besides the Word. The name has been given especially to two solemn acts which have been practiced since the earliest days. Both have been commanded by Jesus. He told His disciples to go into all the world and make disciples, "baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."[9] He also told them to repeat the act which He Himself performed "in the night in which He was betrayed," when "He took bread and gave it to them saying, 'This is My body which is broken for you,' " and afterwards gave them the cup of wine, saying, "This cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins."[10] Ever

[9] Matthew xxviii, 19.

[10] I Corinthians xi, 23-25; Matthew xxvi, 26-28.

since that time Christians have been baptising and administering the Holy Supper because they have the command of Christ. These two acts are known as "sacraments" and all Christians are agreed that in them they obtain some special spiritual blessing. For this reason they are numbered among the "means of grace."

We can give them that name because they are *connected with the Word of God.* They are the preaching of the Gospel in its purest and simplest form. They bring us the very heart and center of the Gospel message. Christ wanted men to put their trust completely in Him and in the Heavenly Father, Who is one with Him, and so He gave His Christians these two signs of God's eternal love. They stand for all that Christ has done, for all that God can ever do, for men; they promise all the blessings that He can bestow. There is our baptism! It gathers all the possible blessings of the Gospel, puts them into the single word "salvation," and says to each person who is baptised, "All this belongs to you"; for Christ has said, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be

saved." And even though the day when we received that baptism may be far behind us, and even though we did not know on that day all that baptism really means, we can still look back to it and be very certain that the blessings of the Gospel have really been given to us. There is the Holy Supper! It offers to those who eat and drink of it every good thing that can come to them from the Christ Who died upon the cross and rose again. It says to them, "All this is yours, Christ's life and death belong to you, as surely as you eat this bread and drink this cup." For Jesus said, "My body is broken for you; My blood is shed for the remission of your sins."

Thus these sacraments bring us the Word of God, and with it, the joy and peace and pardon it confers. They are a promise sealed with solemn, sacred acts which Christ Himself commanded. They give us an assurance on which our faith can rest, and through which our confidence in the Heavenly Father's love and mercy can daily grow more firm and strong.

The sacraments have always had so large

a place in the thought of Christians that their ideas of them have gone very far apart. The Roman Church counts seven sacraments instead of two, and holds a view of them that differs widely from that which has been stated here. Protestants, too, have disagreed about them. They have not agreed about the meaning of the Saviour's words, "This is My body; this is My blood." The truest explanation of them is that with the bread and wine the Christ Who died upon the Cross is really present. His body and His blood are the sign He gives us that the blessings of His life and death are ours. The early Christians thought of the Holy Supper as a sign of fellowship with one another and with Christ. They thought of it also as a sign of hope, pointing to the Judgment Day, and the perfect fellowship that will be ours in another life than this. They called it "Eucharist," "the feast of thanksgiving" for all the blessings that men have in Christ. So, too, with Baptism! St. Paul calls it a "washing of new birth," meaning that in it there is a real power, a real planting of faith and right-

eousness. We speak of it as a "covenant," a solemn pledge by which God gives Himself to us and we give ourselves to God.

In thinking of the sacraments, it is now one and now another of these things that is uppermost in our minds. But what concerns us here is the thought that they are "means of grace." They do nothing that the Word of God cannot do without them, but they are a peculiarly sacred and solemn way of bringing us the blessings of the Word, and they are a way that Christ has Himself appointed.

One thing more must be said before we leave this subject. The Word of God and the Sacraments are God's way of bringing the Gospel and the power of Christ to us. But it is quite possible for Christ to come to us without doing us any good. There is no magic in Word or Sacrament. The mere fact that we have read the Bible and listened to sermons and seen and lived with Christian people does not necessarily make us any different from other men, nor does the mere circumstance that we have been baptised and

received the Holy Supper. It is only Christians, that is, believers, who get the benefits and the blessings which the Gospel brings. The Gospel gives us a God to trust in; it lays foundations for men's faith; but unless the house of faith is built, the foundation is in vain; unless we accept the blessings and the power of the Gospel, we remain just what we were before the Gospel came to us. And yet when we, as Christians, look back upon our lives, we know that our Christian faith is not of our own creation; it is God that has given it to us, and the means that He has used has been the Word and the Sacraments.

If our thought about the "means of grace" is true, if this is the way God actually works to give men faith and raise and purify their lives and make them like Himself, then we must think of God as all about us, touching our lives continually with His Word upon the lips and in the lives of other men. We must think of the Holy Spirit seeking all the time to enter us through Word and Sacrament, striving to direct our purposes away from self and toward the perfectness

of Jesus Christ. Then we can appreciate the meaning of that word of St. Paul, with which this chapter was begun, "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."[11]

[11] Ephesians ii, 8.

CHAPTER X

The Christian's Life

A man who is truly a Christian cannot live like one who is not. That should be obvious. The New Testament dwells on it often. "Why call ye Me, 'Lord, Lord,' " said Jesus, "and do not the things that I say?"[1] "By their fruits ye shall know them" is a rule of Christ's which St. Paul applied to all men.[2] "What ye were" and "what ye are"[3] is a contrast that he was always asking those first Christians to whom he wrote to make. He is never tired of reminding them that they are "a new creature in Christ."[4] If the religion of Jesus Christ is really what we have been trying to say that it is, then there is every reason why those who profess it should be different from other men.

[1] Luke vi, 46. [2] Matthew vii, 16; *cf.* Galatians, 5: 22ff., Ephesians v, 9. [3] *e. g.* I Corinthians vi, 9-11. [4] II Corinthians v, 17; Galatians vi, 15.

And yet, when we look around us we are likely to find that there is little visible difference between the lives of Christians and of other men. In the early days of the Church Christian writers could point triumphantly to the lives of Christians as the best proof that Christianity is divine; in the Twentieth Century we have to explain why Christianity is divine in spite of the little difference that men can observe between the life of so-called Christians and the common life of the world.

There are two reasons for this change. For one thing, *the world is far more Christian than it knows or thinks.* We can say this even while we are still haunted by the memories of a bloody war and in a time when deep shadows are hanging over the world's future. Ideas that have their roots in Christian thought have made their way into the common thinking of the world. Sins of lust are still terribly prevalent; in certain circles they are brutally paraded and boasted of; but in the days of Jesus they were practiced in the temples of cultured Greece as works

of service and worship to the gods. Drunkenness was once respectable; our own land has lately made the sale of intoxicants a crime. Wars of conquest were once a nation's glory; to-day they are a nation's shame. There is still enough, and far more than enough, of sin and wrong and evil in public and in private life, but the fact is that the standards by which men and groups of men now judge themselves and one another are nearer to those of the New Testament than ever they have been before. The influence of Jesus has spread, and still is spreading, round the world.

The second reason why things seem to have changed is that *a larger number of professing Christians are Christians in little more than name.* There have always been such people. Christ had a Judas among the Twelve and in St. Paul's little church at Corinth there were immoral men.[6] But when to be known as a Christian meant to incur enmity and suspicion, and sometimes bloody persecution, no one would admit that he was a Christian unless he was mightily

[6] II Corinthians v.

in earnest about it. On the other hand, in days like our own, when it is rather expected that a man shall profess to be a Christian, it is not surprising to find many people making that profession when they are not in earnest about it at all. It stands to reason that in the year 1922 the average church-member in Korea will be more serious in his convictions than the average church-member in New York.

In Christian lands, then, there is in these days a sort of spiritual "No-Man's-Land." It belongs almost equally to those who have made profession of Christian faith, but are insincere or half-hearted about it, and to those who have never made any such profession, but whose lives have been really touched by the Holy Spirit, though, perhaps, without their knowing it. The lives of these two kinds of people show little or no outward difference that we can detect.

Of course, it is easy to make too much of this outward likeness. God deals with character and motive before He deals with conduct. Jesus tells us that we must make the tree good, before we try to make its fruit

good.[7] Many men are really better than they seem; many are worse than they seem. That is why St. Paul warns us, "Judge nothing before the time, before the Lord come, Who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts."[8] The important thing is that in the life of a Christian there are forces at work which do continually change his life from within. In some measure and to some degree such a man does live the life of Christ, and insofar his life is "hid with Christ in God."[9]

If we ask what sort of life this is, the answer must be given in the life of Jesus. He is not only the Saviour of men, but the type and model of all the men who are saved. As His life was twenty centuries ago, so ought our lives to be to-day. In other lands than those He knew, amid customs and institutions quite unlike those of His day, our lives must still bear "the marks of the Lord Jesus."

[7] Matthew xii, 33. [8] I Corinthians iv, 5. [9] Colossians iii, 9.

That means for one thing, that a Christian's life must be *a life of faith.* A Christian ought to trust God as Jesus trusted Him. As carefree as the flowers of the field, as untroubled as the birds that fly, so Jesus said a man's life ought to be, and so His life was. It must be in God's hands. The hardships that the future holds, the sorrows that to-morrow may bring, ought not to disturb in any way the Christian's quietness of mind. These things are God's concern. A Christian ought not to be troubled by what men think of him nor worried at all about the consequences of the things he does. The one great question of every moment ought to be the question of St. Paul, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"[10]

And that brings us to the second mark of the Christian life. It is *a life of loyalty.* The word is common enough among us, but the thing that the word stands for is not often seen. We talk of loyalty to a government, to principle, to truth; but those are

[10] Acts ix, 6.

figures of speech. True loyalty is devotion to a person. It is the same quality that a soldier shows when he follows his officer into a position where he expects to lose his life. It is the quality of personal devotion which only the rarest individuals are able to call out. A Christian's loyalty is given to God and Christ. God is his God, Whom he has learned through Christ to know and trust and love. What he does is done for Christ's sake and for His sake Whom he has learned to call his Father in heaven. God is his God and he is God's servant. Therefore it is for God to command and for him to obey. He seeks and desires to do God's will. When he is sure what God's will is, he has no choice but just to do it. That was the kind of obedience that Jesus paid to His Father. It goes far beyond the Ten Commandments; they are only a guide to knowledge of God's will.

Because of this, it follows that a Christian's life will be *a life of prayer*. For in a life of faith prayer is a necessary, an inevitable thing. The hour of prayer is the hour

when we speak to God, when we allow ourselves to be conscious of that unseen Presence Who is always with us. We know in these moments that God is by us and within us, and these are the times when we gather strength from Him, vision to see and power to do His will. That was the place that prayer had in the life of Jesus. The forty days in the wilderness prepared Him for His mission; the prayer on the mountain of Transfiguration heartened Him for the journey up to Jerusalem; the night in Gethsemane strengthened Him for the Cross.

When we speak of prayer, the thing that we have most commonly in mind is the offering of petitions for the things we need and want. Jesus told His disciples that they should offer such petitions and gave them the model of a perfect prayer for Christian men to pray. "In everything let your requests be made known unto God,"[11] was Paul's direction. But we must not forget that there is a kind of prayer in which no words are spoken, a silent, humble outgoing

[11] Philippians iv, 6.

of a believer's heart to the God in Whom he trusts. In a moment of great joy we open our lives, as it were, and let God in to be the witness and the partner of that joy; in a time of deep sorrow and distress, we open them again to let Him be partaker and supporter of the burdens we are bearing. The truer our faith and the deeper our desire to do God's will, the more we feel our need for those moments of approach to Him, and the more completely we depend upon the power gathered in those moments to carry us along the path of daily duty.

Still another thing that marks the Christian life is its *dependence on the Word of God.* To do God's will we must know God's will, and there is nowhere else to learn it than the Scriptures. The thought of God, as it has been spoken by prophets and apostles, must be the continual companion of our own thought; even Jesus learned from the Scriptures what He had to do. But more than that, it is the Scriptures that must provide the real ground for Christian faith. It is only there that we can learn why we

have the right to call God our Heavenly Father, and to trust in Him; it is only there that we find the Christ, Who is our Saviour. Every great Christian, since first there were Christians in the world, has found God in His Word.

But the quality that really makes the Christian's life is *love*. The supreme lesson about God that Jesus has taught us is that He is love; the supreme ambition that He kindles in the hearts of men is to be God-like. Therefore He could sum up the whole of Christian duty in the two commandments, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God—and thy neighbor as thyself."[12]

The whole history of the progress of men and nations toward the purposes of God could be written around that one little word. "God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son,"[13] is the way St. John summed up the meaning of the Gospel. "We love Him because He first loved us"[14] is the way that he describes the effect of the Gospel

[12] Luke x, 27.
[13] John iii, 16.
[14] I John iv, 19.

on those who receive it. "Love is the fulfilling of the law"[15]; "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him"; "This commandment have we from Him, that he who loves God, love his brother also."[16] These are but a few of the words in which the New Testament speaks of that love which makes the real inwardness of Christian living. Around this little word, "love," many ideas have gathered which tend to obscure its real meaning. We use it in senses that cannot apply to Christian love at all; we abuse it to purposes that are vile and fleshly. Commonly we think of it as sentiment or feeling, with a suggestion of weakness and softness. But love, in the Christian sense, is a robust and manly thing. It is motive, it is driving-power, it is the force that lies behind the most vigorous action. The will of God directs us, it sets our purposes and marks out the channels for our action; it is the force of love that carries us along God's ways to His goals. We do the will of God, not because we must, or because we are afraid not to do it, but

[15] Romans xiii, 10. [16] I John iv, 16.

because the will of God is the one thing we wish to do; and we wish to do God's will because we have learned to love Him.

The root of it lies, perhaps, in gratitude. If we really believe that everything we have which is worth having comes to us from God, then we are ungrateful unless we wish to do His will. If we are convinced that He is indeed the Heavenly Father of Whom Jesus spoke, Who is interested in us for our own sakes and Who gives because it is in His nature to be always giving, then our love for Him should waken as simply and inevitably as the ripe apple falls from the tree or the tides rise to the moon. This love that we give back to the God Who loves us is the strongest and purest motive that life can have. It is pure unselfishness, the one great quality in which a man can approach most nearly to the character of God. It lies beneath every truly Christian act that a man can perform, and ofttimes it is present when the power for action is denied. It makes the real difference between the man who is and the man who is not a Christian. Two men may do the same thing, perform

the same act. To the observer, who sees the act but knows nothing of the motive, there would seem to be no difference; but the one act may be prompted by utter selfishness, the other by the love of God. Between the quality of those two acts we cannot judge, but in His sight to Whom motives are as plain as deeds, the difference is that of day and night.

And that leads directly to another mark of the Christian's life. It is *a life of sacrifice.* For sacrifice is the only measure that can be applied to love. If you would know how deep and true a man's love is, test it by asking what it would give away; not what of money or other material thing, but what of himself. How great is the sacrifice that he will make for the person or the thing he loves? Answer that question, and then learn what is the object of his love, and you know the man.

The love of Jesus was made perfect in sacrifice,—in self-denial, in poverty, in the Passion and the Cross; and He has said, "If any man will be My disciple, let him

deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me."[17] Just as His life was one of sacrifice, so the element of sacrifice must enter into the life of every man who would be a follower of His. We must give what we would like to keep, and give it freely, if we would really be counted among those in whom the life of Christ is growing up.

That does not mean that we must simply throw away the precious things that God has given us. There is a self-denial that is not sacrifice, there is a voluntary suffering that is sheer waste. There was a time when men left home and friends and family and turned their backs upon the world to become dwellers in the deserts, thinking that by this kind of self-denial they could win God's favor. That was not Jesus' way. He wasted nothing, not a day, not an hour of those few precious years of labor. Men's need was calling all the time for that which only He could give, and so He gave until He had given all. That is the Christian's sacrifice, the spirit that will hold nothing back, but spends, when need requires, till there is

[17] I John iv, 21.

nothing left to spend. It was of this kind of sacrifice that Christ must have been thinking when He said, "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it."[18] When selfishness wins we lose; when selfishness loses, we win.

Therefore a Christian's life is sure to be *a life of struggle*. It is natural for men to want to take and keep the things they like. That impulse is born with us; it stays with us till we die. In the desire to get the most for self and make the most of self lies the real root of all the sin and misery of which the world continues to be full. Against that deeply intrenched desire the Christ-life has to struggle for expression. That makes our inner selves a battle-ground where the evil, which is selfishness, and the good, which is love, are contending for the mastery. The never-ending fight of good with evil, of God with Satan, is fought within the hearts and wills of men. It is a battle of unseen powers. The conflicts that we see are but the signs of it. The one great sin of selfishness takes

[18] Matthew x, 39.

many forms and finds its way out to the light through the thousand opportunities that we call temptations; the one great virtue of love makes but slow headway in the effort to rule our lives. And so the fight goes on year after year, God trying to raise us up and make us pure and strong and like Himself, sin dragging us down and keeping us weak and unclean with selfish desires.

Yet through all this struggle, the Christian's life is *a life of joy*. There is a power in Christian faith that makes us always glad even amid sorrow; there is a sweetening of life through love that gives us pleasure even in sacrifice. There is a happiness in service that selfishness can never bring, and there is a never-failing spring of gladness in the consciousness that God is with us. Even in the times of hardest struggle, we have the certainty that in the end the victory will lie with God and not with sin, that the time is coming when temptation will have no more power upon our lives, and "God will be all in all."[19]

[19] I Corinthians xv, 28.

CHAPTER XI

The Kingdom of God

No Christian lives alone. His faith in Christ draws him into fellowship with other men, with all the men and women everywhere who share that faith, and the lives of all of them together are united with the life of Jesus Christ. *They live in the Kingdom of God.*

Jesus was always talking about that kingdom. In our New Testament He seems to call it sometimes the Kingdom of God, sometimes the Kingdom of Heaven, but it is likely that in the language that He spoke it was the same word that He always used. He spoke of it so constantly that we must believe He thought it the most important of all the things He had to tell the world about. He had a habit of beginning His parables with the words, "The kingdom is like" this or that; He told the Jews that His miracles

were a proof that "the Kingdom of God had come upon them";[1] He told His disciples that it was their special privilege to "know the mysteries of the kindom";[2] He taught them to pray, "Thy kingdom come";[3] when He stood before Pilate He claimed to be a king, but said, "My kingdom is not of this world."[4] Let us try, then, to get some clear idea of what Jesus meant when He spoke about the Kingdom of God.

The very first thing that Jesus teaches us about the kingdom of God is that *there is such a thing.* It is a kingdom that is here on earth now. It is not the same thing as "heaven,"—a State that is to be founded after this world has passed away. It has been founded already. Jesus said, "It is within you."[5] To be sure, it is not perfect or complete. It has to grow up to completeness in this world of sinning, struggling men. The grain of mustard-seed has to root and sprout and become the tree;[6] the wheat has to ripen to the harvest[7]; the yeast has to

[1] Luke xi, 20. [2] Mark iv, 11. [3] Matthew vi, 10.
[4] John xviii, 36. [5] Or, "among you," Luke xvii, 21.
[6] Matthew xiii, 31. [7] Matthew xiii, 24*ff*.

work slowly through the mass of flour.[8] But the kingdom is here, and when we pray "Thy kingdom come," we are praying not only that the Lord may "descend from heaven with a shout," but rather that He will complete a work that He has already begun. The kingdom has been here ever since Jesus came.

Then, too, Jesus teaches us that *God's kingdom is also His own kingdom.* His people were looking for a king. Prophets had foretold His coming; poets had sung the glories of His future reign. There was a name all ready for him when he should appear,—the name "Messiah," or "Anointed," which the Greeks translated into "Christ." Jesus accepted the honors paid Him by those who believed that He was this promised king; he allowed the name of Christ to be given to Himself; He died because He would not say that the people who gave Him that name and hailed Him as their king were wrong; and on His head, in mockery, the Romans pressed a crown

[8] Matthew xiii, 33*ff*.

of thorns and on His Cross they hung the title, "This is the king of the Jews."[9] To get Jesus' idea of God's kingdom, we must, therefore, read the life of Jesus, and not His words alone.

And that suggests at once another truth about God's kingdom. It is *a kingdom in which the king is a servant.* His title to the crown rests on the service He has rendered. That is its great contrast with the kingdoms of the world. All the kingdoms that men knew when Jesus lived, and for centuries afterwards, were founded in force, in the power which compels men to obey laws which they have not made and against which they may be in continual inward rebellion. The kings of those earlier days were rulers, lords, masters; the subjects of the kings were those who served them. No wonder Pilate mocked the Saviour with a crown of thorns! He could not understand. Jesus had said, "If My kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight,"[10] and a king whose servants would not fight for

[9] John xix, 19. [10] John xviii, 36.

him was, in the Roman's eyes, no king at all.

The power that Jesus used to conquer the hearts of men and bring them under the rule of God was the power of righteousness and love. The works of mercy day by day, the healing of the sick, the feeding of the hungry, the roadside parable, the sermon on the hillside or from the boat,—these were the king's works.[11] The greatest of all His conquering battles was His willing death upon the Cross. Even to us, whose allegiance He has won through the service He has rendered, it seems a strange kind of royalty. But royalty it is, a kingship founded in service.

Of course that does not mean that the kingdom of God is without a king. It is not a democracy, in which the will of the majority is the law for everybody, but a kingdom, in which there is just one, all-controlling will,—the will of God. To be in that kingdom, I must loyally accept the will of God and make it, so far as I can, my own. The king is, indeed, everyone's servant, but His subjects must be willing to

[11] *Cf.* Matthew xi, 1-5.

be served. To live in God's kingdom, I must let Him serve me in His own way, and I must serve Him, also in His own way. That is what Jesus meant by saying, "Not everyone that sayeth unto Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom, but he that doeth the will of My Father."[12] It is because He knew how hard this is, that He said, "Except ye be changed, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom."[13] It was for that reason that He told Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."[14] But when a man accepts the service that God renders Him, he does enter that kingdom, and become one of the great multitude who have done the same thing, and who are trying by the king's help, to live by the king's will, which is the kingdom's law.

And that leads us right on to another truth about God's kingdom. *The king's subjects form a society.* They are not just so many hundreds, or so many thousands,

[12] Matthew vii, 21. [13] Matthew xviii, 3.
[14] John iii, 3.

of separate men and women, each living his own life alone and trying, in isolation, to guide his actions by the will of God; nor are they a crowd, all massed together and moving as the will of God directs. But they form a kingdom. There is law in it, and order. The lives of its subjects touch upon other lives and have relations of all kinds with these other lives, and the nature of these relations is determined by the will of God. We talk of mercy and justice and love as qualities of God; but God could not be just and merciful and loving unless there were someone to whom He could be just and merciful and loving. We speak of these same qualities as things which ought to be in every Christian's life, but they could not be there unless there were other people for Christians to live with. The purpose of Jesus was to bring men close to God; but it was a part of His purpose to bring men close to one another also. His thought is always looking forward to a time when the kingdom shall be perfect and its subjects will be removed from all contact with "those that are without." But that time has not yet come.

For the present, the world is like the field in which the wheat and the weeds are growing side by side,[15] and the wheat must not become weeds. The king's subjects are living every day with those who are not his subjects, but even in their dealings with these others, they are bound to live by the kingdom's law.

What, then, is that law? Reduced to its lowest terms, it is the commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself."[16] But that statement is too brief for us to get its meaning fully. To complete it, we need to go to the Sermon on the Mount.[17] There the law of the kingdom is stated so plainly that no one can misunderstand it. The Sermon covers only three pages of our New Testaments, but it describes a perfect society of perfect men. It pictures a State in which every member sets an example to every other, letting "his light shine before men, that they may see his

[15] Matthew xiii, 24-30, 38. [16] Mark xii, 30, 31.
[17] Matthew v-vii.

good works." There is no murder and no war, because the first movement of hatred against another man is forbidden; even the angry word has no place in this society. There are no sins of the flesh, because sinful desire is ruled out of this kingdom, and its subjects would rather pluck out their eyes and cut off their hands than let these members lead them into wrong-doing. There is no deception in this perfect State, and no hypocrisy; no one wants to be known as any better than his fellows, nor does anyone set himself to judge another, but every man is his own severest judge. There is no private property, for no one feels the need of it; men are not aiming to lay up for themselves the treasures of this world, but the better treasures of righteousness; and because there is no selfish grasping after wealth, there is no poverty. There is no worry and no care, for no man's heart is divided in the effort to serve two masters, but each has one single Master, Whom he serves with all his heart, and looks to this one Master to supply him with everything he needs; he has but to ask, and all that is good for him is

his. Thus all the laws that govern the relations of man to man within the bounds of this society can be reduced to the single maxim, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them." All this is possible, however, only because the State which Christ is describing is the kingdom of God, in which every man trusts his King and loves Him and renders Him the full allegiance of his heart. It is the picture of a society in which the law of love to God and man has worked out into human life.

Here, then, is the whole law of the kingdom, in its outlines. We can fill in a detail here and there from other parts of the Saviour's teaching; we can make it more complete, if we compare with it the teaching of St. Paul and of St. John; but this does not change the main features of it in any way. The picture, as Jesus drew it, is all we need to have.

Now everybody knows that no such society has ever existed anywhere in the world. Indeed there are some very good Christians

who believe that no such society is possible. They would explain all that Jesus has said about the kingdom as merely a prophecy of another world. Of course it is a prophecy; Christians are glad to believe that heaven will be just such a society as that which Jesus has described. But the law of the kingdom does bind the consciences of Christians now. It does not wait for the time when Christ shall come to be our Judge. If we believe the prophecy, we are bound to work for the fulfilment of it; if we believe that the law of the kingdom is the law of God, we are bound to live by that law here and now. We pray, "Thy kingdom come," and if the prayer is genuine we must live for the answering of it. It was a Christian of deep insight who explained this prayer by saying, "God's kingdom comes, indeed, without our prayer, but we pray, in this petition, that it may come unto us also"; and then added, "This happens when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that we believe His Holy Word, and lead a godly life here on earth, and in heaven everlastingly."

If we look at the world around us, we can see that there are great forces even now at work for the establishment of God's kingdom upon earth. If that kingdom is a society in which all men do the will of God, then every power that helps the world toward the will of God must be helping to bring His kingdom. God works in so many ways, that we cannot limit our thought of His activity to any one kind of force. When we look back upon the time in which the Saviour lived, we can see that the rise and fall of empires, the thoughts of men who had never heard of Israel's God, even the spread of false religions, had been preparing the way for the advent of the Son of God. And so, in the days that have passed since Jesus lived on earth, there have been many forces working for the coming of the kingdom. They have not all been consciously directed to that end; some of them have seemed, at times, to be working in the opposite direction; but God has been using them all the time for His own purpose. We can say with certainty that every society in which men live close to one another may become

a force, in the hand of God for bringing His kingdom a little nearer. As we think of these societies there are three that stand out above all the rest.

One of them is *the State*. It is the human institution through which the will of God can be made effective upon the outward lives of men. It limits and controls men's conduct from the outside. It forbids actions that are harmful to other men and directs men's conduct toward the common good. The State had done this, of course, before Christ came; it has been doing it ever since. It has taken many forms; monarchy, autocracy, oligarchy, aristocracy, democracy are names that are on everybody's lips these days. Most recently men have been talking about the socialistic State and even of "anarchy" as possible forms of organization. But all of these forms, even anarchy, have this one thing in common,—they are a means by which people are controlled; they give the daily life of men an organization through which some will—the will of the people or the will of the ruler or the will of a ruling class—can be made effective.

Of course, it is not possible for any State to be the kingdom of God on earth. It lies in the very nature of the kingdom that it must control men's lives from within, not from without. But the State does provide a means by which the law of the kingdom can be outwardly applied to human conduct. It can say, "Thou shalt not kill," though it cannot say, "Thou shalt not hate"; it can say, "Thou shalt not steal," though it cannot say, "Thou shalt not be dishonest."

In every State—whether it be an empire, a kingdom or a republic—the citizens of the Kingdom of God, who live within it, are a "salt," preserving and seasoning the mass;[18] they are a "leaven," leavening the whole lump.[19] The completeness with which the lump is "leavened," and the mass "salted" can be measured by the things that the State is trying to do, by the relations it maintains among its citizens, by the way that it acts toward other States. For Christ's word, "Ye shall know them by their fruits"[20] applies to societies and governments, as well

[18] Matthew v, 13. [19] Matthew xiii, 33.
[20] Matthew vii, 16.

as to men. Every Christian must find his idea of the perfect State in Christ's teaching about the Kingdom of God. He is in duty bound to use every effort to make the State in which he lives as like the kingdom as may be possible.

Another of these associations is *the Family*. It is the oldest of human institutions, older than the State. The book of Genesis tells us that in the beginning God decreed that man should not be alone. He gave him a woman to be his comrade, and man and woman are the beginning of the family. Out of their comradeship new relations arise,—the relation of children and parents, brothers and sisters. They are the closest relationships that the world can know.

For that reason Jesus used them to describe the relations that exist in the Kingdom of God. When He spoke of His own relation to the God Whom men had known before He came, He used the words "Father" and "Son" to describe it. Father of Christ, in the common meaning of the word, God could not be; Son of God, in the common meaning of the word, Christ could

not be; but "father" and "son" were the only words in human language which could even suggest the nearness of Christ to Him Whom He called Father. So, when He spoke of the relation of men to one another and to God within the kingdom, He used the words, "Father," "children," "brothers." That use of the words runs all through the Sermon on the Mount. When the King's subjects speak to Him, they are to say, "Our Father, Who art in heaven." They are not to worry about food and clothing, "for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."[21] The man who lives in the kingdom must think of every other as his "brother," and treat him as a brother should be treated. The apostles caught this idea from their Master. All through the New Testament we find the same language used. St. Paul can write to the Ephesians about "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ from Whom the whole family is named,"[22] and St. John can say, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God."[23]

[21] Matthew vi, 32. [22] Ephesians iii, 14, 15.
[23] I John iii, 2.

This continual use of family-words to describe the life of the Kingdom of God must give peculiar sacredness to a Christian's idea of the family. Surely if there is any place on earth where the will of God can rule the lives of men and women, it must be in that circle where the lives of parent and child and brother and sister meet in closest contact and flow together to form a single common life. It is in such a group that the law of love can find its purest and most complete expression; and when that family-life is nourished by a living faith in Christ and in God, for Christ's sake, it offers a truer picture of the kingdom of God than any other that the world can know. It is easier than for any other human institution for the family to be the kingdom of God in miniature. Thus the family helps to bring the kingdom. For the kingdom comes with the touch of human life on human life, under the will of God.

There is a third great agency by which God brings His kingdom here on earth. It is *the Church,* and the Church is the most important of them all. For the Church is

the association of men and women who believe in Jesus and hope and pray and labor for the coming of His kingdom.[24] The aims of the State are earthly, and therefore temporary; it has to do with outward things,—with conduct, not with character; with law, not with motive; with force, not with conviction. But the aims of the Church are spiritual, and therefore permanent; it deals with the inward things,—with beliefs and hopes and desires, with all the things that mould men's lives from within. It witnesses to Christ and proclaims His law of love. It labors to carry conviction to the hearts and souls of men, to touch them in their consciences and fill them with faith. If the State is an agency of the kingdom of God, it is because the spirit of the Gospel has grown into it, at least a little way; if the family is bringing the rule of God a little nearer, it is because the influence of Jesus is working there. And the Church is the messenger of that Gospel through which alone the purifying power of God works on the hearts

[24] For other meanings of the word "Church," see Chapter I.

of men in the family and the State.

It is this which gives the Church its supreme importance in the coming of the kingdom. Often it has been called the kingdom of God on earth, but that name is misleading, and therefore dangerous. More than once it has carried the Church into paths that led away from, instead of toward, its proper purpose. The Church's real power is lost as soon as it begins to lay its emphasis on outward things,—on organization, on conduct, on the use of force. That is why Church and State can never be united without injury to both. To preach and teach and confess the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and thus to lead men one by one into the kingdom of God,—that is the Church's mission. Then these "children of the kingdom," living in families, living under and forming a part of earthly governments, mingling with other men in associations of every kind, become the "salt of the earth," which keeps human society from rotting away and dying of its own selfishness, the "leaven," which spreads the qualities of the kingdom into all the relations of life.

CHAPTER XII

The Christian Hope

The religion of Jesus Christ is a religion of hope. Jesus taught His disciples to look forward. When He parted from them He left with them more than one promise that had not been fulfilled, and when they preached to other men they gave them these same promises as a part of Christ's Gospel. So the promises of Jesus passed permanently into His religion. Until the things He promised have actually come to pass, Christians will always be waiting for them. This is their hope. It is not just a deep desire or a great longing. It is rather a part of their faith in Christ and in the Father, Whom He has taught them to love and trust. Expectation is so much a part of their religion that if it were destroyed, the religion itself would die. That is what St. Paul felt when he wrote, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miser-

able."[1] What, then, are those things that Jesus has taught us?

It is easy to sum them all up in a single phrase,—*Christians look for the coming of the kingdom of God.* There will be a time when the life of man will actually be the kind of life that Jesus described when He spoke about the kingdom.[2] There will be a time when all the sin and all the wrong and all the evil that we see around us and within us here will be entirely gone, and all the men and women who have entered the kingdom will live together under the kingdom's law of love. Jesus never said whether this completed kingdom would be here upon this earth or in a new-made world that shall take the place of this one, nor did He ever say when all this would come to pass; but He did teach very clearly that when it came it would be only the completion of what He had already begun. "The kingdom is here," was the declaration He was always making; "The kingdom will come" was the promise He was always giving.

Again, every Christian believes that, when

[1] I Corinthians xv, 19. [2] See Chapter XI.

the kingdom is completed, *it will be Christ Himself Who will complete it.* Jesus Himself spoke of that very often. He told His disciples that He would come again and take them unto Himself[3]; He told His enemies that they would see Him "coming with power and great glory,"[4] the angels of the Ascension said, "This same Jesus shall come again."[5] And so the hope of Christ's return passed into the preaching of the earliest Christian missionaries as one of the most important parts of the message they had to preach.

How important they considered it, is easy to see from the number of times it is mentioned in the books of the New Testament. There is scarcely another single subject which has so large a place in the words of Jesus which the Gospels have preserved, and there is not a writer of the New Testament who does not have something to say about the return of Christ. They speak of it again and again. Jesus is coming to fulfil all the unfulfilled promises, to finish all the unfin-

[3] John xiv, 2, 3, 28; *cf.* xvi, 16ff.
[4] Matthew xxiv, 30. [5] Acts i, 11.

ished part of His work. Here and there, in the first-written books, it appears that these earliest Christians were expecting Him to come immediately. He might come any day; He must come soon. They remind themselves of words of Christ Himself,—"Watch ye, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh,"[6] "Blessed are those servants whom their Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching."[7] St. Paul numbers himself and the readers of his Thessalonian letter among those who may hope to see it all.[8] But as time went on and still the promise was not fulfilled, many became impatient and some began to doubt. "Where is the promise of His coming?" they began to ask.[9] That same history has often been repeated. At times the hope of the Second Advent of Christ has flamed up, vivid and intense; at other times it has been faint and far away. But the promise of Jesus has never been forgotten, and the belief that He will come again has always been a part of the Christian hope.

[6] Matthew xxv, 13. [7] Luke xii, 37.
[8] I Thessalonians iv, 17. [9] II Peter iii, 4.

About the time and the manner of His coming there have been many curious questionings. Men have read the book of Revelation and the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, and have thought to prophesy from them. They have believed that they could fix the year, almost the very day, when He should come. Especially in times of great disturbance, when the world has been full of war, when revolutions have convulsed the social order, when everywhere there has been "distress of nations, with perplexity,"[10] some men have thought that these were signs that the second advent of Christ was near. It is not surprising that we should find in our own days many such believers in the speedy ending of the world. But Jesus said, "Of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only";[11] "As the lightning, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be";[12] "In an hour when ye think not, the Son of Man cometh";[13] and the Apostles, remembering one of the words of Jesus,

[10] Luke xxi, 25.
[11] Matthew xxiv, 36.
[12] Matthew xxiv, 27.
[13] Matthew xxiv, 44.

wrote, "The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night."[14]

In Christ's own teaching His Second Advent is always spoken of as *a time of judgment.* It must be that, if it is to bring the completion of the kingdom of God. The word that decides who shall be admitted to the kingdom also decides who shall be kept out. The one class must be separated from the other. The unfaithful servants must be sorted out from among the faithful, the tares from among the wheat, the goats from among the sheep, the bad from among the good.[15] The enemies of the kingdom must suffer the penalty of defeat. Good must triumph over evil. In all this there is nothing hard or cruel, there is no revenge nor any hatred. It is a decision that has to be made. Indeed, the decision has been made already by those who are to be judged, and Jesus always bade His followers look forward to the day of judgment as a time of joy. It is to be for them a marriage-feast,

[14] Matthew xxiv, 43; I Thessalonians v, 2; II Peter iii, 4. ff.

[15] Matthew xxiv, 45ff.; xiii, 30; xxv, 32; xiii, 49.

a great supper, the entrance of the servant into "the joy of his Lord."[16]

But very early in the history of the Gospel, men began to ask some questions about all this. They began to ask, "How about the dead? How about those Christians who have waited in vain for Christ's return to take them to Himself? Are they outside the kingdom? If we shall die before Christ comes, shall we be excluded from the glory of it? Or will there be some way for all of us to share Christ's joy?"

Those were questions that St. Paul had to meet.[17] He had his answer ready. Those who have died, he says, will have the same part in Christ's kingdom as those that shall "remain unto the coming of the Lord." For there will be *a resurrection of the dead*. No Christian need fear that death will "separate him from the love of Christ."[18] Jesus Himself went down to death, but rose again, to live forever. He has become "the first-fruits of them that slept."[19] He has said,

[16] Matthew xxv. 1-10, 21, 23; xxii. 2-14.
[17] 1 Thessalonians iv. 13ff.; 1 Corinthians xv. 12.
[18] Romans viii. 38, 39. [19] 1 Corinthians xv. 20.

"Because I live, ye shall live also."[20] Men who believe in Jesus' resurrection will never be afraid of death. They know it cannot keep them out of the kingdom of God. The loyalty of faith that binds us to Christ, binds us to Him forever, and our relation to the kingdom, once it has been formed, is a relation that only our own wilful desertion of the kingdom can destroy. The assurance of a life of blessedness with Christ is the very heart and center of the Christian hope.

About this future resurrection, too, there have been many speculations. Even in St. Paul's day Christians were asking, "How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?" The Apostle's answer was, "Thou fool!" Then he goes on to say that all we know about this body of the resurrection is that it will be a "spiritual" body. "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption, it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in honor; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body—and as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall

[20] John xiv, 19.

also bear the image of the heavenly."[21]

And those are but a few of the many questions that men are always asking and have been for nineteen hundred years. They say, "Where are the dead before the resurrection? What is their condition? Are they conscious? Are they happy?" Jesus gives us no plain answer. Only twice, in all His written sayings, has He dropped a hint of it. In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, He suggests that there are differences among the dead, even before the day of judgment;[22] in His word to the dying thief, He makes it clear that those who have been loyal to Him here are with Him, where He is.[23] St. Paul speaks of the dead as "those that have fallen asleep"[24] and says of himself that he has "a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" than "to abide in the flesh."[25]

Men ask again, "Can the dead look back? Are they conscious of what is happening here? Are they, perhaps, trying to send

[21] I Corinthians xv, 35-49. [22] Luke xvi, 22-26.
[23] Luke xxiii, 43.
[24] I Corinthians xv, 6, 18; I Thessalonians iv, 13, 15.
[25] Philippians i, 23.

messages back across the barrier of death to those whom they have left behind?" It is wrong for Christians to make light of these questions. To those that ask them they are many times the anxious inquiries of hearts that are ready to break with sorrow; but Christ is silent, and we can only say with St. Paul, "Now I see in a glass, darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know, even as also I am known."[26] And so it is with those other questionings about the life that will precede and follow the final judgment,—about the streets and walls and gates of "the Holy City, New Jerusalem,"[27] about the thousand years' reign of Christ here on the earth.[28]

For none of these things has any deep significance in the Christian hope. It centers around the kingdom of God, which is already here, and is one day to be completed. That hope of ours is a deep and unshakable conviction that all of those who have loyally accepted here the lordship of Jesus Christ, who have taken His yoke upon

[26] I Corinthians xiii, 12. [27] Revelation xxi, xxii.
[28] Revelation xx, 2-7.

them and learned of Him, who have come, through Him, to the Father and become willing to trust the Father's love in everything, who have received into themselves the actual presence of God the Holy Ghost, the Helper and the Sanctifier,—that all of these will come into the kingdom, and that none of them will fail, because of death or "any other creature," to enter the blessedness of heaven. About all these other things a Christian may say courageously, "I do not know." The American poet, who had missed, indeed, the fullness of the Christian faith, had caught the true spirit of the Christian hope, when he sang,

> "I know not where His islands lift
> Their fronded palms in air;
> I only know I cannot drift
> Beyond His love and care."